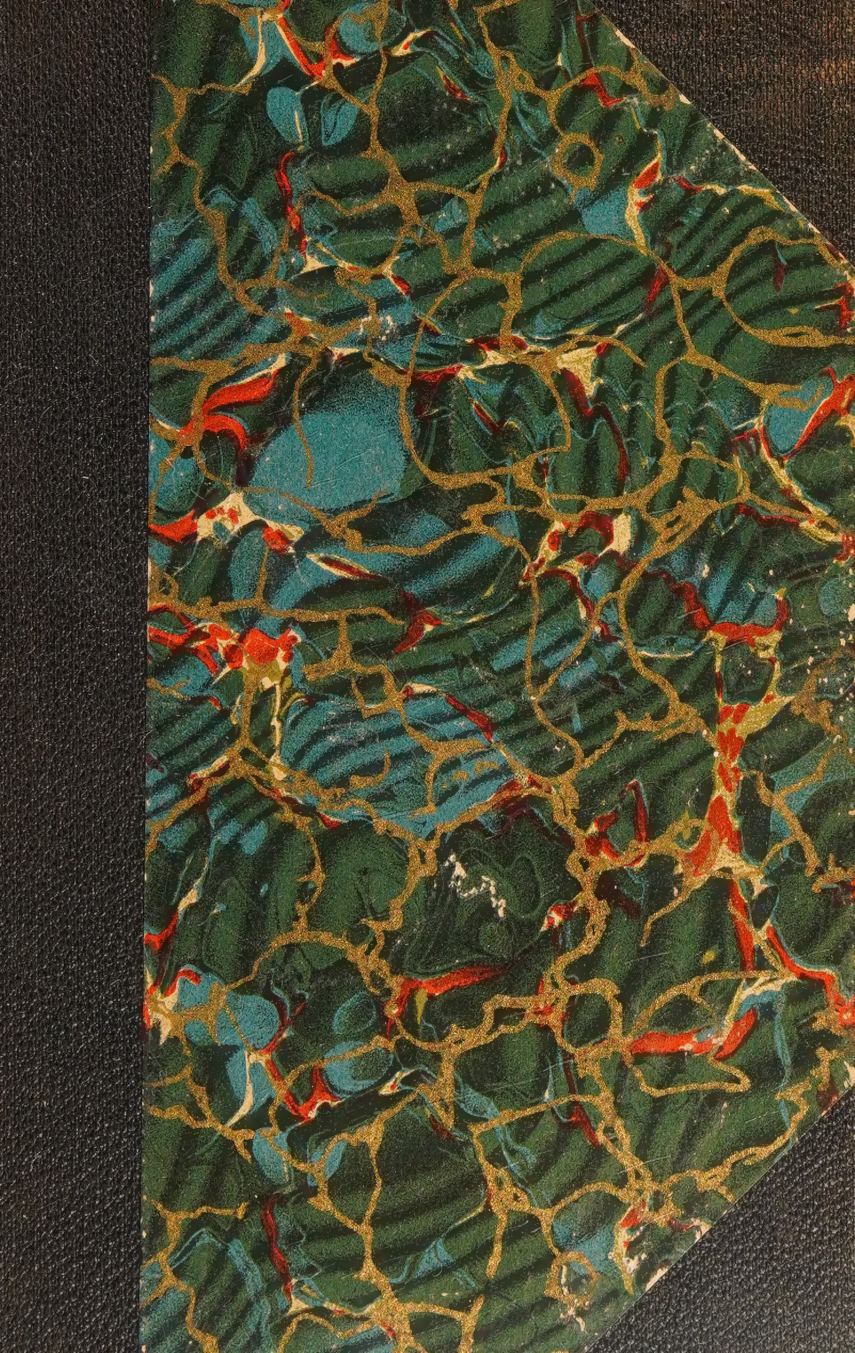

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The Count thought the situation was long drawn out, and he touched her on the shoulder.—*Useless Beauty.*

Selected Stories

BY

Guy De Maupassant

Translated and Edited by

Dora Knowlton Ranous

VOLUME IV

The Legacy, The Rondoli Family, Allouma, Marrocca, Châli, The Wicked Mohammed, A Ghost, Old Amable, A State Affair, Two Little Soldiers, Mademoiselle Fifi
Etc.

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THE LEGACY

I

IT was not yet ten o'clock, yet the employees were flowing in like waves through the great gate of the Ministry of the Marine, coming in haste from every corner of Paris, for the first of the year was approaching, a time for renewed zeal—and for promotions. The noise of hurrying footsteps filled the great building, which was as tortuous as a labyrinth, and was honeycombed with inextricable passages, pierced by the innumerable doors of the various departments.

Each one entered his room, shook hands with his colleagues, threw off his coat, put on his office jacket, and seated himself at a table whereon was a pile of papers. Then they went for news into the neighboring bureaus. They asked whether their chief had arrived, whether he was in a pleasant humor, and whether the mail was heavy.

The clerk in charge of general matter, Monsieur Cæsar Cachelin, an old noncommissioned officer of the marine infantry, who had become order-clerk

in the lapse of time, registered the documents as they were brought in by the doorkeeper of the cabinet. Opposite to him the copying-clerk, Father Savon, a stupid old fellow, known throughout the ministry for his conjugal misfortunes, slowly copied a dispatch from the chief, sitting sidewise with his eyes askew, in the attitude of the careful copyist.

Monsieur Cachelin, a big man, whose short, white hair stood up like a brush, talked constantly while performing his daily task: "Thirty-two dispatches from Toulon. That port gives us as much as any four others."

Then he asked the old man Savon the same question he put to him every morning:

"How is Madame?"

The old man, without stopping his work, replied: "You know very well, Monsieur Cachelin, that subject is painful to me."

Then the chief clerk laughed, as he laughed every day at hearing the same answer.

Then Monsieur Maze entered. He was a handsome, dark young fellow dressed with exaggerated elegance, who thought his person and manners were above his place. He wore large rings, a heavy gold watch-chain, and a monocle (which he discarded while at work), and he had a habitual movement of his wrists to bring into view his cuffs which were ornamented with large shining buttons.

At the door he asked: "Much business to-day?" Monsieur Cachelin replied: "It is always Toulon that keeps sending in. From the way they are

hustling down there, one can easily see that the first of the year is at hand."

But another employee, a great joker, always in high spirits, said laughing:

"We are not hustling at all, are we?" Then taking out his watch he added: "Seven minutes of ten, and every man at his post! Mazette, what do you say to that? and I'll wager that his dignity Monsieur Lesable arrived at nine o'clock—the same hour with our illustrious chief."

The head-clerk put his pen behind his ear, and leaning his elbow on the desk said: "Now, there is a man for you! If he does not succeed, it will not be for want of trying."

Monsieur Pitolet, seating himself on the corner of the table and swinging his leg, said:

"But, Papa Cachelin, you may be sure he will succeed. I will wager you twenty francs against a sou that he will be chief within ten years."

Monsieur Maze rolled a cigarette while warming his legs before the fire, and said:

"For my part, I would rather remain all my life on a salary of twenty-four hundred francs than wear myself to a skeleton as he is doing."

Pitolet turned on his heel and said in a bantering tone: "But that does not prevent you, my dear fellow, from being here before ten o'clock on this twentieth of December."

The other shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference. "*Parbleu!* I do not care to have

everybody walk over my head, either! Since you come here to see the sun rise, I shall do so, too, however much I may deplore your officiousness. From doing that to addressing the chief as 'dear master' as Lesable does, and remaining until half past six and then taking work home with you, is a long way. Besides, I am a man of the world, and I have other demands upon my time."

Monsieur Cachelin had finished his registering and begun to dream, his eyes fixed on vacancy. At last he asked: "Do you believe that he will get an increase again this year?"

Pitolet answered: "I'll bet you ten to one he will. He is not wearing himself out for nothing."

And so they discussed the question of advancement which for a month had excited the whole hive of clerks from the ground to the roof.

They calculated chances, computed figures, compared their claims to promotion, and waxed indignant over former examples of injustice. These discussions lasted all day, and the next day were begun all over again, with the same reasons, the same arguments, the same words.

A new clerk entered, a little, pale, sickly man, Monsieur Boissel, who lived as in a romance of Dumas, *père*. With him everything was an extraordinary adventure, and every morning he recounted to his friend Pitolet his encounters of the previous evening, imaginary scenes in his house, strange cries in the street, which caused him to open

his window at half past three in the morning. Every day he had separated combatants, stopped runaway horses, rescued women from danger; and although of a deplorably weak constitution he talked unceasingly, in a slow and satisfied tone, of the exploits accomplished by his powerful arm.

When he understood that they were talking of Lesable he declared: "Some day I will give that little whiffet his deserts; and if he ever walks over my head, I'll bang him so that he won't try it again."

Maze, continuing to smoke, sneered: "You would do well, then, to begin at once, for I hear on good authority that you are to be displaced this year by Lesable."

Boissel raised his hand. "I swear that if—"

The door opened once more, and a dapper little man wearing side-whiskers like an officer of marines or an advocate, and a high, stiff collar, and who spoke rapidly as if he could not take time to finish what he had to say, entered quickly. He shook hands all round, with the air of a man who had no leisure for dallying, and said to the head-clerk: "My dear Cachelin, will you give me the Chapelou papers, rope yarn, Toulon A. T. V., 1875?"

The clerk rose, reached for a portfolio above his head, took out a package of sealed documents wrapped in blue linen, presented them and said: "Monsieur Lesable, you will remember the chief took three dispatches from his package yesterday."

"Yes, I have them. Thank you," and the young man went out hurriedly.

Hardly had he gone when Maze ejaculated:

"*Hein!* what an air! One would swear he is chief already."

And Pitolet replied: "Patience! he will be that before any of us."

Monsieur Cachelin had not resumed his writing. It seemed that a fixed thought had taken possession of him. At last he said: "That boy has a fine future!"

But Maze murmured disdainfully: "For those who think the ministry is a career—yes. For the others it is a little—"

Pitolet interrupted him: "Perhaps you intend to become an ambassador?"

The other made an impatient gesture. "It is not a question of me; I can take care of myself. That has nothing to do with the fact that the mere chief of a bureau will never be anything great in the world."

Father Savon, the copyist, never had ceased from work. But for some time he had been dipping his pen in the inkstand, then wiping it vigorously on a sponge that stood in a little glass of water on his desk, without being able to trace a letter. The ink slipped along the point of the pen and fell in round spots on the paper. The good man, driven to despair as sheet after sheet was spoiled, said in a sorrowful voice:

"Here is more adulterated ink!"

There was a general burst of laughter, and Cachelin shook the table with his stomach. Maze bent double, as if he were going up the chimney backward. Pitolet stamped and roared and waved his hands in the air, and even Boissel was almost suffocated, though he generally looked at such things on the tragic rather than the comic side.

But Father Savon, wiping his pen on the tail of his coat, said: "There is nothing to laugh at. I must go over all my work two or three times."

He took from his box another sheet of paper, laid his wax sheet over it, and began again: "Monsieur the Minister and Dear Colleague—" The pen now held the ink and traced the letters neatly. The old man settled down into his oblique posture and continued his work.

The others were still laughing, fairly choking, in fact. For six months they had played the same game on the poor old fellow, who never had detected it. This consisted in pouring several drops of oil on the damp sponge used for wiping pens. The metal, thus coated with liquid grease, would not take the ink, and the perplexed copying-clerk would pass hours in using boxes of pens and bottles of ink, and finally declare that the supplies of the department were becoming absolutely worthless.

Then the jokers would torment the old man in other ways. They put gunpowder in his tobacco, and drugs into his bottle of drinking-water, and

made him believe that, since the Commune, the majority of articles for general use had been adulterated by the socialists, to put the government in the wrong and bring about a revolution. He had conceived an intense hatred for anarchists, whom he believed to be concealed everywhere, and had a mysterious fear of an unknown woman—veiled and formidable.

A bell sounded in the corridor. They well knew the emphatic ring of their chief, Monsieur Torchebeuf, and every one sprang toward the door, that he might regain his own compartment.

Cachelin returned to his work. Then he laid down his pen again, and rested his head on his hands to reflect.

He turned over an idea that had tormented him for some time. He was an old noncommissioned officer of marines, retired after receiving three wounds, one at Senegal and two in Cochin China, and given a place in the ministry by exceptional favor and had to endure many miseries, many hardships, and many griefs in his long career of lowest subordinate. He considered official authority the finest thing in the world. To him the chief of a bureau was an exceptional being, living in a higher sphere; and the employee of whom he heard it said, "He is a sharp one; he will get there yet," appeared to him of another race, another nature, than himself.

Therefore he had for his colleague Lesable a re-

spect that approached veneration, and he cherished a secret desire, which never was absent from his mind, to have him marry his daughter.

She would be rich one day, very rich. This was known throughout the entire ministry; for his sister, Mademoiselle Cachelin, possessed a million, a clear, cool million, acquired through love, they said, but purified by a tardy religious devotion.

This ancient spinster, who had led a gallant life in her youth, had retired with five hundred thousand francs, which she had more than doubled in eighteen years, thanks to her strict economy and more than frugal habits. She had lived a long time with her brother, who was a widower with one daughter, Coralie; but she did not contribute anything to the expenses of the house, guarding and accumulating her gold, and repeating without cessation to Cachelin: "It makes no difference, since it is all for your daughter; but marry her quickly, for I wish to see my little nephews around me. It is she who will give me the pleasure of embracing a child of our blood."

This was well understood throughout the administration, and suitors were not lacking for Coralie's hand. It was said that Maze himself, the handsome Maze, the lion of the bureau, hovered around Father Cachelin with an evident intent. But the former sergeant, who had roamed through all latitudes, wanted a young man with a future, a young man who would be chief, and would be able to make some return

to him, the old clerk. Lesable suited him to a nicety, and he cast about for some way of attaching him to himself.

Suddenly he sat upright, striking his hands together. He had found it. He well understood the weakness of each of his colleagues. Lesable could be approached only through his professional vanity. He would go to him and demand his protection as one goes to a senator or a deputy—as one goes to a high personage.

Not having had any advancement for five years, Cachelin considered himself certain to obtain one this year. He would make it appear then that he owed it to Lesable, and would invite him to dinner as a means of thanking him.

As soon as his project was conceived he began to execute it. He took off his office jacket, put on his coat, and, gathering up all the registered papers that concerned the service of his colleague, he betook himself to the bureau that Lesable occupied all alone, by special favor, because of his zeal and the importance of his functions.

The young man was writing at a great table, covered with bundles of documents and loose papers numbered with red and blue figures.

As soon as he saw the order-clerk enter, he said in a familiar tone, which also betokened consideration: "Well, my dear fellow, do you bring me a lot of business?"

"Yes, it is not bad. I wish to speak to you, too."

"Sit down, my friend; I am listening."

Cachelin seated himself, coughed, put on a troubled look, and finally said in a despondent tone:

"This is what brings me here, Monsieur Lesable. I will not beat about the bush. I will be frank, like an old soldier. I come to demand a service of you."

"What is it?"

"In few words, I wish very much to obtain an advance this year. I have nobody to assist me, and I have thought of you."

Lesable, surprised, flattered, and filled with a pleased confusion, reddened somewhat. He said:

"But I am nobody here, my friend. I am much less than you, who are going to be principal clerk. I can do nothing. Believe me that if—"

Cachelin cut him short with respectful brusqueness: "Tra, la, la. You have the ear of the chief, and if you speak a word for me I shall pass. Remember that in eighteen months I shall have gained the right to retire, and I shall be just five hundred francs to the bad if I obtain nothing on the first of January. I know very well that they say: 'Cachelin is all right; his sister has a million.' It is true enough that my sister has a million, but she doesn't give away any of it. It is also true that her fortune is for my daughter, but my daughter and I are two different persons. I shall be in a nice fix if, when my daughter and my son-in-law are lolling in their carriage, I have nothing to put between my teeth. You see my position, do you not?"

Lesable gave his opinion freely. "It is true—what you say is very true. Your son-in-law may not be well disposed toward you. Besides, one is always more at ease to owe nothing to anybody. Well, I promise you I shall do my best; I shall speak to the chief, place the case before him, and insist if it be necessary. Count on me!"

Cachelin rose, took the hands of his colleague, and pressing them hard while he shook them in military fashion, stammered: "Thank you! thank you! believe me, if ever I have the opportunity—if I can ever—" He stopped, not being able to finish what he had begun, and went away making the corridor resound with the rhythmical tread of an old trooper.

But he heard from afar the sharp ring of a bell and he began to run. He knew that ring. It was the chief, Monsieur Torchebeuf, who wanted his order-clerk.

Eight days later Cachelin found one morning on his desk a sealed letter, which contained the following:

"My dear Colleague: I am happy to announce to you that the minister, at the instance of our director and our chief, yesterday signed your nomination to the office of principal clerk. You will receive to-morrow your official notification. Until then you know nothing, you understand? Truly yours,

"Lesable."

Cæsar ran to the office of his young colleague, thanked him, excused himself, offered his everlasting devotion, overwhelmed him with his gratitude.

It was known on the morrow that Lesable and Cachelin had each obtained an advancement. The other employees must wait another year, receiving by way of compensation a gratuity that varied from one hundred and fifty to three hundred francs.

Monsieur Boissel declared that he would lie in wait for Lesable at the corner of the street at midnight some night and give him a thrashing that would leave its mark. The other clerks kept silent.

The following Monday, Cachelin on his arrival went to the office of his protector, entered with solemnity and in a ceremonious tone said: "I hope you will do me the honor to dine with us during the Epiphany. You shall choose the day yourself."

The young man, somewhat surprised, raised his head and looked his colleague full in the face. Then he replied, without removing his eyes, that he might read the thoughts of the other: "But, my dear fellow, you see—all my evenings are promised here for some time to come."

Cachelin insisted in a good-humored tone: "Oh, but I say you will not cause us mortification by refusing after the service you have rendered me. I pray you in the name of my family and in mine."

Lesable hesitated, perplexed. He had understood well enough, but he did not know what to reply, not having had time to weigh the pros and the cons. At last he thought: "I commit myself to nothing by going to dinner," and he accepted with a satisfied air, choosing the Saturday following. He added,

smiling: "So that I shall not have to get up too soon the next morning."

II

Monsieur Cachelin lived in a little apartment on the fifth floor of a house at the upper end of the Rue Rochechouart. There was a balcony from which one could see all Paris, and three chambers, for his sister, his daughter, and himself. The dining-room served also for a parlor.

He was busy during the week in preparing for this dinner. The *menu* was discussed at great length, in order that they might have a repast that should be at the same time home-like and elegant. The following was decided upon: A *consommé,* with eggs, shrimps and *saucissons* for the side-dish, a lobster, a fine chicken, *petits pois conservés,* a *pâté de foies gras,* a salad, an ice, and dessert.

The *foies gras* was ordered from a butcher, with an injunction to furnish the best quality, and the earthen pot cost three francs and a half extra.

For the wine, Cachelin applied to the wine-merchant at the corner who supplied him with the red beverage which he ordinarily drank. He thought it not best to go to a great house, reasoning thus: "The small dealers find few occasions to sell their best brands. On this account they keep them a long time in their cellars, and they are therefore better."

He came home early on Saturday to assure himself that all was ready. The maid who opened the door for him was red as a tomato, for she had lighted her fire at midday from fear of not being ready in time, and had roasted her face at it all day. Emotion also excited her. He entered the dining-room and inspected everything. In the middle of the little room the round table made a great white spot under the bright light of a lamp covered with a green shade.

The four plates were almost concealed by napkins folded in the form of an archbishop's miter by Mademoiselle Cachelin, the aunt, and were flanked by knives and forks of white metal. In front of each stood two glasses, one large and one small. Cæsar considered this insufficient, and he called: "Charlotte!"

The door at the left opened, and a little old woman appeared. She was older than her brother by ten years, and had a narrow face framed with white ringlets, which she did up in papers every night. Her thin voice seemed too weak for her little bent body, and she moved with a slightly dragging step and tired gestures.

They had said of her when she was young: "What a dear little creature!" She was now a shriveled old woman, very proper according to her early training, headstrong, spoiled, narrow-minded, fastidious, and easily irritated. She had become very devout, and seemed to have totally forgotten the gay and romantic adventures of her early days.

She asked: "What do you want?"

He replied: "I find that two glasses do not make much of a show. If we could have champagne—it would not cost me more than three or four francs; we have the glasses already, and it would entirely change the aspect of the table."

Mademoiselle Charlotte replied: "I do not see the use of going to that expense. But you pay; it does not concern me."

He hesitated, seeking to convince himself:

"I assure you it would be much better. And then for the cake of the kings* it would make it more lively." This reason decided him. He took his hat and went down stairs returning at the end of five minutes, having under his arm a bottle that bore on a white label ornamented with an enormous coat of arms the words: "Grand vin mousseux de Champagne du Comte de Chatel-Rénovau."

Cachelin declared: "It cost only three francs, and the man says it is exquisite."

He took the champagne glasses from the cupboard and placed them before the plates.

The door at the right opened, and his daughter entered. She was a tall girl with firm, rosy flesh—a handsome daughter of a strong race. She had chestnut hair and blue eyes. A simple gown outlined her round and supple figure; her voice was strong, almost the voice of a man, with those deep

*The Epiphany cake.

notes which make the nerves vibrate. She cried: "Heavens! Champagne! What happiness!" and clapped her hands like a child.

"I wish you to be particularly nice to this gentleman," said her father, "he has rendered me many services."

She laughed—a sonorous laugh, which said: "I know."

The bell in the vestibule rang. The doors opened and closed, and Lesable appeared.

He wore a black coat, a white cravat, and white gloves and presented a fine appearance. Cachelin sprang forward, embarrassed and delighted: "But, my dear fellow, this is among ourselves. Look at me—I am in ordinary dress."

The young man replied: "I know, you told me so; but I am not accustomed to go out in the evening without my dress-coat." He saluted, his hat under his arm, a flower in his buttonhole. Cæsar presented him: "My sister, Mademoiselle Charlotte; my daughter Coralie, whom at home we call Cora."

Everybody bowed. Cachelin continued: "We have no salon. It is a little snug, but it will serve."

Lesable replied: "It is charming."

Then he was relieved of his hat, which he wished to hang up, and he drew off his gloves.

They sat down and looked at one another across the table, and no one said anything more until Cachelin asked: "Did the chief remain late to-night? I left very early to help these ladies."

Lesable replied in a careless tone: "No, we went away together, as we were obliged to discuss the payment for the canvasses at Brest. It is a complicated affair, which will give us a great deal of trouble."

Cachelin believed he ought to bring his sister into the conversation, and turning to her said: "It is Monsieur Lesable who tackles all the difficult questions at the bureau. One would say he was the double of the chief."

The old spinster bowed politely, saying: "Oh, I know Monsieur has a great deal of capacity."

The maid entered, pushing open the door with her knee, and holding aloft with both hands a great soup tureen. Then the master of the house said: "Come—dinner! Sit there, Monsieur Lesable, between my sister and my daughter. I don't believe you are afraid of the ladies," and the dinner was begun.

Lesable played the agreeable with a little air of self-sufficiency, almost of condescension, and glanced now and then at the young girl, astonished at her freshness, her beautiful, appetizing health. Mademoiselle Charlotte, knowing the intentions of her brother, showed her best side, and took part in the conversation so long as it was confined to commonplace topics. Cachelin was radiant; he talked and joked in a loud voice while he poured out the wine. "A little glass of this Burgundy, Monsieur Lesable. I do not say that it is anything remarkable, but

it is good; it is from the cellar and it is pure—I can say that much. We get it from some friends down there."

The young girl was silent; a little red, a little shy, she was awed by the presence of this man, whose thoughts she suspected.

When the lobster appeared, Cæsar declared: "Here comes a personage with whom I shall willingly make acquaintance."

Lesable, smiling, told a story of a writer who had called the lobster "the cardinal of the seas," not knowing that before being cooked the animal was a dark greenish black. Cachelin laughed with all his might repeating: "Ha, ha, ha! that is capital!" But Mademoiselle Charlotte, becoming serious, said sharply:

"I do not see anything amusing in that. That gentleman was an improper person. I understand all kinds of pleasantries, but I am opposed to anything in my presence that casts ridicule on the clergy."

The young man, wishing to please the old maid, profited by this occasion to make a profession of the Catholic faith. He spoke of the bad taste of those who treated great truths with lightness. And in conclusion he said: "For myself, I respect and venerate the religion of my fathers; I have been brought up in it, and shall remain in it till my death."

Cachelin laughed no longer. He rolled little

crumbs of bread between his finger and thumb while he murmured: "That's right, that's right." Then he changed the conversation, and, with an impulse natural to those who follow the same routine every day, he asked: "Our handsome Maze—isn't he furious at not getting an advance?"

Lesable smiled. "What would you have? To each according to his deserts." And they continued talking about the ministry, which interested everybody, for the two women knew the employees almost as well as Cachelin himself, from hearing them spoken of every day.

Mademoiselle Charlotte was particularly pleased to hear about Boiselle, on account of his romantic spirit, and the adventures he was always telling about, while Cora was secretly interested in the handsome Maze. They never had seen either of the men, however.

Lesable talked about them with a superior air, as a minister might have done in speaking of his *personnel*.

"Maze is not lacking in a certain kind of merit; but if one wishes to accomplish anything, it is necessary to work harder than he does. He is fond of society and of pleasure. All that distracts the mind, and he never will advance much. He will be a subchief, perhaps, thanks to the influence he commands, but nothing more. As for Pitolet, he is a good clerk, I must say. He has an elegance of system that cannot be gainsaid, but nothing deep.

There is a young man whom one could never put at the head of an important bureau, but who can always be utilized by an intelligent chief who would lay out his work for him."

"And Monsieur Boiselle?" asked Mademoiselle Charlotte.

Lesable shrugged his shoulders: "A poor chap, a poor chap. He sees nothing in its proper proportions, and is always imagining wonderful stories while half asleep. To us he is of no earthly use."

Cachelin began to laugh. "But the best of all," he declared, "is old Father Savon."

Then everybody laughed.

After that they talked of the theaters and the different plays of the year. Lesable judged the dramatic literature of the day with the same authority, concisely classifying the authors, describing the strength and weakness of each, with the assurance of a man who believes himself to be infallible and universal.

The roast was finished. Cæsar now uncovered the pot of *foies gras* with the most delicate precautions, which made one imagine the contents to be something wonderful. He said: "I do not know whether this one will be a success, but usually they are perfect. We get them from a cousin who lives in Strasburg."

Each one ate with respectful deliberation of the butcher's *pâté* in its little yellow pot.

But disaster came with the ice. It was a sauce, a

soup, a clear liquid, which floated in the dish. The little maid had asked the pastry-cook's boy, who brought the ice at seven o'clock, to take it out of the mold himself, fearing that she would not know how.

Cachelin, in despair, wished to make her carry it back again; then he calmed himself at the thought of the cake of the kings, which he divided with great mystery as if it contained a prime secret. All fixed their gaze on the symbolic cake, then Mademoiselle Charlotte directed that each one close his eyes while taking a piece.

Who would be the king? A childish, expectant smile was on the lips of all. Monsieur Lesable uttered a little "ah!" of astonishment, and showed between his thumb and forefinger a great white bean still covered with pastry. Cachelin began to applaud, then cried: "Choose the queen!"

The king hesitated an instant only. Would it not be a politic act to choose Mademoiselle Charlotte? She would be flattered, brought over, his friend ever after! Then he reflected that it was really Mademoiselle Cora for whom he had been invited, and that he would appear like a ninny in choosing the aunt. He turned toward his youthful neighbor, and handing her the royal bean said: "Mademoiselle, will you permit me to offer it to you?" And they looked each other in the face for the first time.

She replied: "Thank you, Monsieur," and received the gage of sovereignty.

He thought: "She is enormously pretty, this girl. Her eyes are superb. She is gay, too, if I am not mistaken!"

A sharp detonation made the two women jump. Cachelin had just opened the champagne, which escaped from the bottle and ran over the tablecloth. Then the glasses were filled with the frothy stuff and the host declared: "It is of good quality, one can see that." But as Lesable was about to drink to prevent his glass from running over, Cæsar cried: "The king drinks! the king drinks! the king drinks!" And Mademoiselle Charlotte, also excited, squeaked in her thin voice: "The king drinks! the king drinks!"

Lesable emptied his glass with composure, and replacing it on the table said: "You see I am not lacking in assurance." Then turning to Mademoiselle Cora he said: "It is yours, Mademoiselle!"

She wished to drink, but when everybody cried: "The queen drinks! the queen drinks!" she blushed, began to laugh, and put the glass down again.

The end of the dinner was full of gayety; the king showed himself most attentive and gallant toward the queen. Then when they had finished the liqueurs Cachelin announced:

"We will have the table cleared away now to give us more room. If it is not raining, we can spend a few minutes on the balcony." He wanted Lesable to see the view, although it was night.

The glass door was thrown open, and a moist

warm breeze entered. It was mild out of doors as in April. They all mounted the step that separated the dining-room from the large balcony. They could see nothing but a vague glimmer hovering over the great city, like the gilt halos on the heads of the saints. In some spots this light seemed more brilliant, and Cachelin began to explain:

"See, that is the Eden blazing down there. Look at the line of the boulevards. *Hein!* how you can distinguish them! In the daytime it is splendid, this view. You would have to travel a long way before you saw anything finer!"

Lesable was leaning on the iron balustrade, by the side of Cora, who gazed into the void, silent, distraught, seized with one of those melancholy languors which sometimes oppress the soul. Mademoiselle Charlotte returned to the room, fearing the humidity. Cachelin continued to speak, his outstretched hand indicating the places where they would find the Invalides, the Trocadéro, the Arc de Triomphe.

Lesable in a low voice asked: "And you, Mademoiselle Cora, do you like to look at Paris from this height?"

She gave a little shiver, as if she had been dreaming and answered: "I? Yes, especially at night. I think of all the things which are passing there below us. How many happy people and how many who are unhappy, in all these houses! If one could see everything, how many things one might learn!"

He came a little nearer, until their elbows and their shoulders touched.

"By moonlight this should be like fairyland."

She murmured: "Ah, yes, indeed. One would say it was an engraving by Gustave Doré. What pleasure one might have in taking a long promenade on these roofs."

Then he questioned her regarding her tastes, her dreams, her pleasures. And she replied without embarrassment, like an intelligent, reflecting girl, not more imaginative than was necessary.

He found her full of good sense, and he said to himself that it would be wonderfully sweet to pass his arm about that firm, round figure, and to press a score of little slow kisses, as one drinks in little sips of excellent *eau-de-vie,* on that fresh cheek, near the ear, just where a ray from the lamp fell upon it. He felt himself attracted, moved by the sensation of the proximity of a beautiful woman, by the thirst for her ripe and virginal flesh, and by that delicate seductive influence a young girl possesses. It seemed to him he could remain there for hours, nights, weeks, forever, leaning toward her, feeling her near to him, thrilled by the charm of that contact. And something like a poetic sentiment stirred his heart in the face of that great Paris, spread out before him, brilliant in her nocturnal life, a life of pleasure and debauchery. It seemed to him that he dominated the enormous city, that he hovered over it; and he thought how delicious it would be to recline every

evening on such a balcony near to a woman, to love her and be loved by her, to press her to his breast, far above the vast city, and all the earthly loves it contained, above all the vulgar satisfactions and common desires, near to the stars.

There are nights when even the least exalted souls begin to dream, and Lesable felt as if he were spreading his wings for the first time. Perhaps he was a little tipsy.

Cachelin went inside to get his pipe, and came back while lighting it. "I know," he said, "that you do not smoke, or I would offer you a cigarette. Nothing is more delightful than to smoke here. If I had to live on the ground, I should die. We could do it if we cared to, for the house belongs to my sister, as well as the two neighboring ones—the one on the right and the one on the left. She has a nice little revenue from these alone. They did not cost a great deal, either, when she bought them." And turning toward the window he cried: "How much did you pay for these lots, Charlotte?"

Then the thin voice of the old spinster was heard speaking. Lesable could only hear broken fragments of the sentences: "In eighteen hundred and sixty-three—thirty-five—francs—built—afterward—the three houses—a banker—sold for at least five hundred thousand francs—"

She talked of her fortune with the complaisance of an old soldier who reels off stories of his campaigns. She enumerated her purchases, the high

offers she had since received, her superior values, and other details.

Lesable, interested, turned about, resting his back against the balustrade of the balcony. But as he still caught only tantalizing scraps of what the old woman said, he brusquely left his young companion and went within where he might hear everything; and seating himself beside Mademoiselle Charlotte he conversed with her a long time on the probable increase in rents and what income should accrue from money well placed in stocks and bonds. He left toward midnight, promising to return.

A month later nothing was talked about in the bureau but the marriage of Jacques Léopold Lesable with Mademoiselle Céleste Coralie Cachelin.

III

The young people began housekeeping on the same floor with Cachelin and Mademoiselle Charlotte, in an apartment similar to theirs, from which the tenant was expelled.

A certain uneasiness, however, disturbed the mind of Lesable; the aunt had not wished to assure her heritage to Cora by any definite act. She had, however, consented to swear "before God" that her will was made and deposited with Maître Belhomme, the notary. She had promised, moreover, that her entire fortune should revert to her niece under one sole condition. Being pressed to reveal

this condition, she refused to explain, but averred with a smile that it was very easy of fulfillment.

Notwithstanding these explanations and the stubbornness of the old woman, Lesable thought he ought to have further assurance; but, as the young woman pleased him greatly, his desire triumphed over his incertitude, and he yielded to the determined efforts of Cachelin.

Now he was happy, notwithstanding he was always tormented by a doubt, and he loved his wife, who had in nowise disappointed his expectations. His life flowed along, tranquil and monotonous. He became, in several weeks, perfectly inured to his new position of married man, and he continued the same faithful and accomplished employee as formerly.

A year rolled away. The first of the year came round again. To his great surprise, he did not receive the advancement on which he had counted. Maze and Pitolet alone passed to the grade above, and Boiselle declared confidentially to Cachelin that he had promised himself to give his two fellow-clerks a good thrashing at the main entrance before everybody. But he did nothing.

For a whole week Lesable did not sleep a wink on account of the anguish he felt at not having been promoted, despite his zeal. He had been working like a dog; he had filled the place of the under-chief, Monsieur Rabot, who for nine months had been in the hospital of Val-de-Grâce; he had been coming to the office at half past eight every morning, and

remaining until half past six in the evening. What more could they ask? If they could not appreciate such faithful service, he would do as the others did. To everyone according to his deserts. How could Monsieur Torchebeuf, who had always treated him like a son, have sacrificed him thus? He desired to get at the bottom of the thing. He would go to the chief and have an explanation with him.

On Monday morning, therefore, before the arrival of his *confrères,* he knocked at the door of that potentate.

A sharp voice cried: "Come in!" and he entered.

Seated before a great table strewn with papers, his little body bent over a writing-pad which his big head almost touched, Monsieur Torchebeuf was busily writing. On seeing his favorite employee he said cheerfully: "Good morning, Lesable; you are well?"

The young man replied: "Good morning, dear master, I am very well; and you?"

The chief ceased writing and turned about in his revolving chair. His frail, slender body, clad in a black surtout of severe cut, seemed ridiculously disproportioned to the great leather-covered chair. The brilliant rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor, a hundred times too large for the small body which it decorated, burned like a live coal upon his narrow chest. His skull was of considerable size, as if the entire development of the individual had been at the top, after the manner of mushrooms.

His chin was pointed, his cheeks hollow, his eyes protruding and his great bulging forehead was surmounted with white hair which he wore thrown backward.

Monsieur Torchebeuf said: "Sit down my friend, and tell me what brings you here."

Toward all the other clerks he displayed a military brusqueness, considering himself to be their captain, for the ministry was to him as a great vessel, the flag-ship of all the French fleet.

Lesable stammered: "Dear master, I come to ask you whether I have done amiss in any way."

"Certainly not, my dear fellow; why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because I was a little surprised at not receiving my promotion this year, as in former years. Permit me to finish my explanation, dear master, asking your pardon for my audacity. I know that I have obtained from you exceptional favors and unlooked-for advantages. I know that promotions are made, as a general thing, only every two or three years; but permit me to remind you that I furnish the bureau with nearly four times the amount of work of an ordinary employee, and at least twice as much time. If, then, you put in the balance the result of my efforts as labor and the result as remuneration, you will certainly find the one far outweighs the other."

He had carefully prepared this speech, which he judged to be excellent.

Monsieur Torchebeuf, surprised, hesitated before replying. At last he said in a rather cool tone: "Although it is not admissible, on principle, that these subjects should be discussed between chief and employee, I am willing to reply for this once to your question regarding your very meritorious services.

"I proposed your name for advancement, as in preceding years. The manager, however, crossed out your name, on the ground that by your marriage your fortune was assured. You are to come into an inheritance such as your modest colleagues can never hope to possess. Is it not, therefore, just to take into consideration the condition of each one? You will be rich, very rich. Three hundred francs more a year will be as nothing for you, whereas this little augmentation will count for a great deal in the pockets of the others. There, my friend, you have the reason why you remain stationary this year."

Lesable, irritated and covered with confusion, retired.

That evening at dinner he was disagreeable to his wife. She, however, was gay and pleasant as usual. Although she was of an even temper, she was headstrong, and when she desired anything greatly she never yielded her point. She no longer possessed for him the sensual charm of the early days, and although he still looked upon her with the eye of desire, for she was fresh and charming, he experienced at times that disillusion so near to estrange-

ment which soon comes to two beings who live a common life. The thousand trivial or grotesque details of existence, the loose toilettes of the morning, the common linen *robe-de-chambre,* the faded *peignoir,* for they were not rich, and the necessary home duties which are seen too near at hand in a poor household—all these things took the glamor from marriage and withered the flower of poetry which, from a distance, is so attractive to lovers.

Aunt Charlotte also made herself as disagreeable as possible. She never went out, but stayed indoors and busied herself in everything that concerned the two young people. She wished everything conducted in accordance with her notions, made observations on everything, and as they had a horrible fear of offending her, they bore it all with resignation, but also with a suppressed and ever-increasing exasperation.

She went through their apartment with her slow, dragging step, constantly saying in her sharp, nasal voice: "You ought to do this; you certainly ought to do that."

When the husband and wife found themselves alone together, Lesable, who was a bundle of nerves, would cry out: "Your aunt is growing intolerable. I won't stand her here any longer, do you hear? I won't stand it!" And Cora would reply tranquilly: "What do you wish me to do?"

Then flying into a passion he would say: "It is odious to have such a family!"

And she, still calm, would reply: "Yes, the family is odious, but the heritage is good, isn't it? Now don't be an imbecile. You have as much interest as I in managing Aunt Charlotte."

Then he would be silent, not knowing what to say.

The aunt now harried them unceasingly on the subject of a child. She pushed Lesable into corners and hissed in his face: "My nephew, I intend that you shall be a father before I die. I want to see my little heir. You cannot make me believe that Cora was not made to be a mother. It is only necessary to look at her. When one marries, my nephew, it is to have a family—to send out little branches. Our holy mother, the Church, forbids sterile marriages. I know very well that you are not rich, and that a child causes extra expense. But after me you will want for nothing. I want a little Lesable, do you understand? I want him."

When, after fifteen months of marriage, her desire was not yet realized, she began to have doubts and became very urgent; and she gave Cora private advice—practical advice, that of a woman who has known many things in her time, and who can still recollect them on occasion.

But one morning she was not able to rise from her bed, feeling very unwell. As she never had been ill before, Cachelin ran in great agitation to the door of his son-in-law: "Run quickly for Dr. Barbette," he said, "and you will tell the chief, won't you, that I shall not be at the office to-day?"

Lesable passed an agonizing day, incapable of working himself or of giving directions to the other clerks. Monsieur Torchebeuf, surprised, remarked: "You are somewhat distraught to-day, Monsieur Lesable." And Lesable answered nervously: "I am greatly fatigued, dear master; I have passed the entire night at the bedside of our aunt, whose condition is very serious."

The chief replied coldly: "As Monsieur Cachelin is with her, I think that should suffice. I cannot allow my bureau to be disorganized for the personal reasons of my employees."

Lesable, with his watch on the table before him, waited for five o'clock with feverish impatience. As soon as the big clock in the grand court struck he hurried away quitting the office, for the first time, at the regular hour.

He even took a cab to return home, so great was his anxiety, and he mounted the staircase on a run. The nurse opened the door and he stammered: "How is she?"

"The doctor says she is very low."

His heart began to beat rapidly. He was greatly agitated. "Ah, indeed!"

Could she, by any chance, be about to die?

He did not dare to go into the sick woman's chamber now, and he asked that Cachelin, who was watching by her side, be called.

His father-in-law appeared immediately, opening the door with precaution. He wore his dressing-

gown and skullcap, as on the pleasant evenings that he passed in the corner by the fire; and he murmured in a low voice: "It's going bad, very bad. She has been unconscious since four o'clock. She received the viaticum this afternoon."

Then Lesable felt a weakness descending into his legs, and he sat down.

"Where is my wife? "

"She is at the bedside."

"What says the doctor? Tell me exactly."

"He says it is a stroke. She may come out of it, or she may die to-night."

"Have you any need of me? If you have not, I would rather not go in. It would be very painful to me to see her in this state."

"No, go to your own apartment. If there is anything new I will call you at once."

Lesable went to his own quarters. The apartment seemed to him changed—it was larger, clearer. But as he could not rest quietly in one place he passed out upon the balcony.

They were then in the last days of July, and the great sun, at the moment of disappearing behind the two towers of the Trocadéro, rained fire on the immense aggregation of roofs.

The sky, a brilliant shining red at the horizon, took on, farther up, tints of pale gold, then of yellow, then of green—a delicate green flecked with light; then it became blue—a pure and fresh blue overhead.

The swallows passed like flashes, hardly visible, painting against the vermilion sky the curved and flying profile of their wings. And above the infinite number of houses, above the far-off country, floated a rose-tinted cloud, a vapor of fire toward which ascended, as in an apotheosis, the points of the church-steeples and all the slender pinnacles of the monuments. The Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile appeared enormous and black against the conflagration on the horizon, and the dome of the Invalides seemed another sun fallen from the firmament upon the roof of a building.

Lesable held with his two hands to the iron railing, drinking in the air as one drinks of wine, feeling a desire to leap, to cry out, to make violent gestures, so completely was he given over to a profound and triumphant joy. Life seemed to him radiant, the future full of richness! And he began to dream.

A noise behind him made him tremble. It was his wife. Her eyes were red, her cheeks slightly swollen; she seemed fatigued. She bent down her forehead for him to kiss; then she said: "We are going to dine with papa so that we may be near her. The nurse will not leave her while we are eating."

He followed her into the next apartment.

Cachelin was at table. A cold chicken, a potato salad, and a *compôte* of strawberries were on the buffet, and the soup was smoking in the plates.

They sat at table. Cachelin said: "These are days that I shouldn't like to see often. They are not gay." He said this with a tone of indifference and a sort of satisfaction in his face. He ate with the appetite of a hungry man.

But Lesable's stomach was oppressed and his mind ill at ease. He hardly ate at all, keeping his ears strained toward the next room, which was as still as if no one was within it. Nor was Cora hungry, but silent and tearful she wiped her eyes from time to time with the corner of her napkin. Cachelin asked: "What did the chief say?" and Lesable gave the details, which his father-in-law insisted on having to the last particular, making him repeat everything as if he had been absent for a year from the ministry.

"It must have made a sensation there when it was known that she was sick." And he began to dream of his glorious re-entry when she should be dead, at the head of all the other clerks. He said, however, as if in reply to a secret remorse: "Not that I desire any evil to the dear woman. God knows I would have her preserved for many years yet, but all the same it will have that effect. Father Savon will even forget the Commune on account of this."

They were beginning to eat their strawberries when the door of the sick-chamber opened. Then with a common impulse all three diners sprang to their feet, terrified. The little nurse appeared, still preserving her calm, stupid manner, and said:

"She has stopped breathing."

Cachelin, throwing his napkin among the dishes, sprang forward like a madman; Cora followed him, her heart beating; but Lesable remained standing near the door, spying from a distance the white spot of the bed, hardly visible by the light of the dying day. He saw his father-in-law's back as he stooped over the couch, examining but disturbing nothing; and suddenly he heard his voice, which seemed to him to come from very far off, the other end of the world, one of those voices that pass through our dreams and tell us astonishing things. Cachelin said: "It is ended! She is dead." Lesable saw his wife fall upon her knees and bury her face in the bedclothes, sobbing. Then he decided to go in, and as Cachelin straightened himself up the young man saw on the whiteness of the pillow the face of Aunt Charlotte, so hollow, so rigid, so pale, that with its closed eyes it looked like the face of some good woman done in wax.

He asked in a tone of anguish: "Is it finished?"

Cachelin took his eyes from his sister, turned toward Lesable, and the two men looked at each other.

"Yes," replied the elder, wishing to force his visage into an expression of sorrow; but the two understood each other at a glance, and, without knowing why, instinctively, they shook hands, as if each would thank the other for a service rendered. Then they quickly occupied themselves

with the numerous offices required by the dead.

Lesable was charged with going for the doctor and with attending to the more urgent of the things necessary to be done. He took his hat and ran down the staircase, in haste to be in the street, alone, to breathe, to think, to rejoice in solitude over his good fortune.

When he had attended to his commissions, he went across to the boulevard, possessed with a desire to see the crowds, to mingle in the movement of the happy life of the evening. He felt like crying out to the passers-by: "I have fifty thousand francs a year," and he walked along, with his hands in his pockets, stopping before the show-windows, examining the rich stuffs, the jewels, the artistic furniture, with this joyous thought: "I can buy these for myself now."

Suddenly he paused before a mourning-store and the startling thought came into his mind: "What if she is not dead? What if they are mistaken?"

He quickly turned homeward with this doubt troubling his mind, and on entering demanded: "Has the doctor come?"

Cachelin replied: "Yes, he has confirmed the decease and is now writing the certificate."

They re-entered the death-chamber. Cora, still seated in an armchair, wept very gently, without noise, almost without grief now, with a woman's facility for tears.

As soon as they were all three alone in the room Cachelin said in a low voice: "Now that the nurse has gone to bed, we might look around to see whether anything is concealed in the furniture."

The two men set about the work. They emptied the drawers, rummaged through the pockets, unfolded every scrap of paper. By midnight they had found nothing of interest. Cora, fallen asleep, snored a little, in a regular fashion. Cæsar said: "Are we going to stay here until day?" Lesable, perplexed, thought that the proper thing to do. Then the father-in-law said: "In that case, let us bring in armchairs;" and they went out to get the two big silk-flock easy-chairs that furnished the room of the young married couple.

An hour later the three relatives slept, with uneven snorings, before the corpse, icy in its eternal immobility.

They awakened at daybreak when the little nurse entered the chamber. Cachelin immediately said, rubbing his eyes: "I have been a little drowsy for the last half hour."

Lesable, now sitting upright, declared: "Yes, I noticed it very plainly. As for me, I have not lost consciousness for a second; I just closed my eyes to rest them."

Cora went to her own room.

Then Lesable asked with apparent indifference: "When do you think we should go to the notary's to find out about the will?"

"Why—this morning if you wish."

"Is it necessary that Cora should accompany us?"

"That would be better, perhaps, since she is in fact the heir."

"I shall go and tell her to get ready," said Lesable as he went out with a quick step.

The office of Maître Belhomme was just opening its doors when Cachelin, Lesable and his wife appeared there in deep mourning, with faces full of woe.

The notary, promptly greeting them, bade them sit down. Cachelin spoke: "Monsieur, you remember me: I am the brother of Mademoiselle Charlotte Cachelin. These are my daughter and my son-in-law. My poor sister died yesterday; we shall bury her to-morrow. As you are the depositary of her will, we come to ask whether she has not formulated some request relative to her inhumation, and whether you have any communication to make to us."

The notary opened a drawer, took out an envelope from which he drew a paper, and said:

"Here, Monsieur, is a duplicate of the will, the contents of which I will make you acquainted with immediately. The other document, exactly similar to this, is to remain in my hands." And he read:

"I, the undersigned, Victorine-Charlotte Cachelin, here express my last wishes:

"I leave my entire fortune, amounting to about one million one hundred and twenty thousand francs, to the

children who will be born of the marriage of my niece Céleste-Coralie Cachelin, the possession of the income to go to the parents until the majority of the eldest of their descendants.

"The dispositions which follow regulate the share which shall fall to each child, and the share remaining to the parents until their death.

"In the event of my death before my niece has an heir, all my fortune is to remain in the hands of my notary, for the term of three years, for my wish above expressed to be complied with if a child is born during that time.

"But in the case of Coralie's not obtaining from Heaven a descendant during the three years which follow my death, my fortune is to be distributed, by the hands of my notary, among the poor and the benevolent institutions contained in the following list."

Then followed a long series of names of communities, societies, and orders, and of recommendations. Maître Belhomme politely placed the paper in the hands of Cachelin, who stood speechless with astonishment.

The notary thought he ought to add something by way of explanation.

"Mademoiselle Cachelin," said he, "when she did me the honor to speak to me for the first time of her project of making her will according to this plan, expressed to me her great desire to see an heir of her race. She replied to all my reasoning by a more and more positive expression of her wishes, which were based, moreover, on a religious sentiment, she holding that every sterile union was the sign of divine malediction. I have not been able to modify her intentions in the least. Believe

me, I regret this fact exceedingly." Then he added, smiling at Coralie: "But I do not doubt that the *desideratum* of the deceased will be quickly realized."

Then the three relatives went away, too bewildered to think of anything.

Side-by-side they walked home, without speaking, ashamed and furious, as if they had been robbed. Cora's grief, even, had suddenly disappeared, the ingratitude of her aunt driving away all disposition to weep.

At last Lesable, whose pale lips were drawn with rage, said to his father-in-law:

"Pass me that paper, that I may read it with my own eyes." Cachelin handed him the document, and the young man began to read. He stopped on the sidewalk and, jostled by the passers-by, stood there scanning the words with his piercing and practised eye. The others waited a few steps in advance, still silent.

Then he handed back the paper, saying:

"There is nothing to be done. She has tricked us beautifully."

Cachelin, irritated by the failure of his hopes, replied:

"It was for you to have a child, *sacre bleu!* You knew well enough that she wanted it long ago."

Lesable shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

On entering they found a crowd awaiting them, those whose calling brings them where a death has

occurred. Lesable went to his room, not wishing to be bothered, and Cæsar spoke roughly to them all, telling them to leave him in peace, demanding that they get through with it as quickly as possible, thinking they were very long in relieving him of the corpse.

Cora, shut up in her room, made no sound, but at the end of an hour Cachelin rapped on his son-in-law's door.

"I come, my dear Leopold," said he, "to submit some reflections to you, for it is necessary to have an understanding. My opinion is that we should go through with all the befitting funeral exercises, in order to give no hint to the ministry of what has happened. We will arrange about the expense. Besides, nothing is lost. You have not been married very long, and it must be a great misfortune which would prevent you from having children. You must set about it, that's all. And now to business. Will you drop in at the ministry after a while? I am going to address the envelopes for the invitations to the funeral."

Lesable grudgingly agreed that his father-in-law was right, and they sat down face-to-face, each at an end of a long table, to write the superscriptions for the black-bordered cards.

Then they breakfasted. Cora reappeared, apparently indifferent as if nothing of what had passed concerned her, and she ate a good deal, having fasted the evening before.

As soon as the repast was finished she returned to her room. Lesable left to go to the marine, and Cachelin installed himself on the balcony, his chair tilted back, to enjoy a pipe.

The broad sun of a summer day fell perpendicularly upon the multitude of roofs, some of which were pierced with windows that blazed as with fire and threw back the dazzling rays which the sight could not sustain.

And Cachelin, in his shirt-sleeves, looked, with eyes winking under this stream of light, upon the green hillocks, far away beyond the great city, beyond the dusty suburbs. He thought how the Seine flowed there, broad, calm, and fresh, at the foot of hills that had trees on their slopes, and how much better it would be to be lying on one's stomach in that verdure on the bank of the river, gazing into the water, than to be sitting on the burning lead of his balcony. And an uneasiness oppressed him, the tormenting thought, the grievous sensation of their disaster, of that unfortunate, unexpected thing, so much more bitter and brutal that the hope had been so ardent and so long-lived; and he said aloud, as many people do in time of great trouble of mind, in the uprooting of a fixed idea: "Dirty old cow!"

Behind him in the chamber he heard the movements of those who were making the preparations for the funeral, and the continuous noise of the hammer that nailed up the coffin. He had not looked at his sister since his visit to the notary.

But little by little the warmth, the gayety, the clear charm of the beautiful day penetrated to his mind and his soul, and he thought the case was not so desperate. Why should his daughter not have a child? She had not been married two years! His son-in-law appeared vigorous, well built, and in good health, although small. They could have a child, and then besides, by Jupiter, they had to!

Lesable furtively entered the ministry and glided to his room. He found on the table a paper bearing these words: "The chief wants you." He made a gesture of impatience, feeling a revolt against this despotism which had again fallen on his back; then a sudden and violent desire to succeed seized him. He would be chief in his turn, and soon; he would then go higher still. Without removing his frock-coat he went at once to Monsieur Torchebeuf, and presented himself with one of those solemn faces which are assumed on sad occasions. But there was something more—an expression of sincere and profound chagrin, that involuntary dejection which a deep disappointment leaves upon the features.

The great head of the chief was bent over his papers. He raised it suddenly, and said in a sharp tone: "I have needed you all the morning. Why have you not come?"

Lesable replied: "Dear master, we have had the misfortune to lose my aunt, Mademoiselle Cachelin, and I have just come to ask you to attend the funeral, which will take place to-morrow."

The frown on the brow of Monsieur Torchebeuf immediately disappeared, and he replied with a touch of consideration: "That alters the case, my dear friend. I thank you and give you the day, for you must have a great deal to attend to."

But Lesable, desiring to show his zeal, said: "Thank you, dear master, everything is arranged, and I expected to remain here until the regular hour for closing." And he returned to his desk.

The news soon spread, and his fellows came from all the departments to bring him their congratulations rather than their condolences, and also to see how he bore himself. He endured their speeches and their looks with the resigned appearance of an actor, and also with a tact that astonished them.

"He stands it very well," said some.

"Well he may," added others; "he ought to be content—lucky dog!"

Maze, more audacious than any of them, asked with the careless air of a man of the world: "Do you know exactly the amount of the fortune?"

Lesable replied in a disinterested tone: "No, not precisely. The will says about twelve hundred thousand francs. I know that, because the notary was obliged to acquaint us immediately with certain clauses relative to the funeral."

It was the general opinion that Lesable would not remain in the ministry. With an income of sixty thousand francs one does not remain a paper-scratcher. One is somebody and can be something.

Some thought that he aimed at being Counsel of State; others believed that he thought of the Chamber of Deputies. The chief confidently expected to receive his resignation to transmit to the director.

The entire ministry attended the obsequies, which were thought to be very meager. But the word went round: "It is Mademoiselle Cachelin herself who wished it so. It was in the will."

The very next day Cachelin was at his post, and Lesable, after a week of indisposition, also returned, a little pale, but assiduous and zealous as formerly. One would have said that nothing unlooked-for had happened to them. It was only remarked that they ostentatiously smoked very large cigars, that they talked of rents, of railroads, of values, as men who had titles to them in their pockets, and it became known, in a short time, that they had rented a country-house near Paris, in which to spend the summer season.

"They are misers like the old woman," they said. "It runs in the family. Birds of a feather flock together. But with such a fortune it doesn't look well to retain a clerkship."

In a short time the matter was forgotten. They were classed and judged.

IV

After the burial of Aunt Charlotte, Lesable thought again of the million, and, tormented by a

rage all the more violent because it must be kept secret, he hated all the world on account of his deplorable mischance. "Why, having been married two years, have I not had a child?" he asked himself, and the fear of seeing his household remain sterile made his heart sink. Then, as an urchin who sees from afar the shining prize at the end of the goal, and swears to himself to attain it and exerts all the vigor and tenacity necessary to reach it, so Lesable took the desperate resolution to become a parent. So many others had, why might not he also? Perhaps he had been negligent, careless, ignorant of something, the consequence of complete indifference. Never having felt a violent desire for an heir, he never had directed all his energies to obtaining this result. He determined to concentrate all his efforts; he would neglect nothing, and he must succeed because he so much desired to. But when he returned home, he felt ill enough to take to his bed. The disappointment had been too bitter, and he bowed himself to the blow.

This nervous strain brought him to such a state that the physician judged his condition serious enough to prescribe absolute repose as well as an interminable course of treatment. Brain fever was feared. In eight days, however, he was about again and resumed his work at the bureau. But he dared not yet, he believed, approach the conjugal couch. He hesitated and trembled as a general who is going to give battle, a battle on which depends his future.

Each evening he awaited the next day, hoping for an access of virility and energy, a happy moment in which he might accomplish his desire. He felt his pulse every minute, and if it was too feeble or too rapid, he took a tonic, ate raw meat, and strengthened himself in every possible way. As his improvement was not very rapid, Lesable determined to pass the hot months in the country. He persuaded himself that the country air would be a sovereign balm for his weakness, and he assured himself of the accomplishment of the hoped-for success. He said to his father-in-law, in a confidential tone: "When we are once in the country my health will improve, and all will go well." That one word "country" seemed to carry for him a mysterious significance.

They rented a small house in the village of Bezons, and the whole family took up their residence there. The two men set out on foot every morning for the station of Colombes, returning in the evening.

Cora, enchanted at living thus on the banks of the peaceful river, would seat herself on the sward, cull the flowers, and bring home great bunches of delicate, trembling ferns.

Every evening all three walked along the river as far as the tollgate of Morue, and, entering, drank a bottle of beer at the restaurant of The Willows. The river, retarded by the long file of stakes, poured between them and leaped, bubbled, and foamed for

the distance of a hundred feet. The roaring of the falls made the ground tremble, while a fine vapor floated in the air, rising from the cascade like a light smoke, throwing on the surroundings a delightful odor of spray and a savor of wet earth. As night fell, a great light below and in front indicated Paris, and Cachelin exclaimed every evening: "What a city, after all!"

From time to time, a train, passing on the iron bridge that crossed the end of the island, made a rolling as of thunder and suddenly disappeared, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, toward Paris or toward the sea. They returned home slowly, seating themselves on the bank, watching the moon rise and pour on the flood her soft light, which seemed to fuse with the water, and the wrinkles of the current moved like waves of fire. The frogs uttered their short, metallic cries. The calls of the night bird rang out on the air, and sometimes a large, mute shadow glided on the river, troubling her calm and luminous course. It was a band of freebooters who, suddenly throwing in their net, drew it back without noise into their boat, dragging in its vast and somber mesh a shoal of shining and trembling gudgeons, like a treasure drawn from the bottom of the sea, a living treasure of silver fish.

Cora, deeply moved, leaned tenderly upon the arm of her husband, whose design she suspected, although nothing of it had been spoken between them.

It was for them like a new betrothal, a second expectation of the kiss of love. Sometimes he bestowed a furtive caress behind her ear, on that charming spot of tender flesh where curls the first hair. She responded by a pressure of the hand, and they attracted while refusing each other, incited and held back by a will more energetic, by the phantom of the million. Cachelin, appeased by the hope he felt around him, was happy. He drank deeply and ate much, feeling, born in him at twilight, the hour of poetry, that foolish tenderness which comes to the dullest persons in certain aspects of nature: a rain of light through the branches, a sunset behind the distant hills, with purple reflections on the water. He declared: "As for me, before such things I believe in God. It touches me here," and he indicated the pit of his stomach. "I feel myself turned upside down. I am becoming very funny. It seems to me I have been steeped in a bath that makes me wish to cry."

As for Lesable, his health improved rapidly. He was seized with sudden ardors, which he did not understand, and he felt a desire to run like a young colt, to roll in the grass and neigh with delight.

He thought the favored time was approaching. It was a true night of espousal. Then they had a new honeymoon full of caresses and hopes. Later they perceived that their experiments were fruitless and their confidence was in vain.

But in the midst of despair Lesable did not lose

courage; he continued to make the most superhuman efforts. His wife, moved by the same desire and trembling with the same fear, more robust too than he, encouraged him in his attempts and stimulated his flagging ardor. They returned to Paris in the early days of October.

Life became hard for them again. Unkind words fell from their lips, and Cachelin, who scented the situation, harassed them with the coarse and venomous epigrams of an old trooper.

And one incessant thought pursued them, tortured them, and sharpened their mutual rancor—that of the unattainable heritage. Cora now carried a sharp tongue, and lashed her husband. She treated him like a little boy, a mere brat, a man of no importance. Cachelin at every meal repeated: "If I were rich, I should have children in plenty; when one is poor it is necessary to be reasonable." Then turning to his daughter he added: "You ought to be like me; but there—" and he threw on his son-in-law a significant look accompanied by a contemptuous movement of the shoulders.

Lesable made no reply. He felt himself to be a superior man allied to a family of boors.

At the ministry the alteration in his manner was noticed, and the chief one day asked him: "Are you not ill? You appear to be somewhat changed."

Lesable replied: "Not at all, my dear sir. I am a little fatigued, perhaps, having worked very constantly, as you may have seen."

He counted on his advancement at the end of the year, and he had resumed, in this hope, the laborious life of a model employee. But among the meager bonuses that were distributed Lesable's was the smallest of all, and Cachelin received nothing. Struck to the heart, Lesable sought the chief, whom, for the first time, he addressed as "Monsieur."

"Of what use is it, Monsieur, to work as I do if I reap no reward?"

The great head of Monsieur Torchebeuf appeared to bristle.

"I have already told you, Monsieur Lesable, that I will admit of no discussion of this nature between us. I repeat to you again that your claim is unreasonable, your actual fortune being so great as compared with the poverty of your colleagues—"

Lesable could not contain himself. "But I have nothing, Monsieur. Our aunt has left her fortune to the first child that shall be born of our marriage. We live, my father-in-law and I, on our salaries."

The chief was greatly surprised. "Though you have no fortune to-day, at least you will be rich at some future day. It amounts to the same thing."

Lesable withdrew, more cast down by his failure than by the uncertainty of Aunt Charlotte's million.

As Cachelin came to his desk some days later, the handsome Maze entered with a smile on his lips; next Pitolet appeared, his eyes shining; then Boissel opened the door, and advanced with an excited air, tittering and exchanging meaning looks with the

others. Father Savon continued his copying, his clay pipe in the corner of his mouth, seated on his high chair, his feet twisted about the rounds after the fashion of little boys. No one spoke. They seemed to await something, and Cachelin continued to register his papers, announcing in a loud voice, according to his custom: "Toulon: Furniture for the officers of the 'Richelieu.' L'Orient: Diving apparatus for the 'Desaix.' Brest: Samples of sails of English manufacture."

Lesable entered. He came now every morning for information in regard to the affairs that concerned him, his father-in-law no longer taking the trouble to send instructions by the office-boy.

While he searched the bill of sales of the bureau of the order-clerk, Maze watched him from his corner, rubbing his hands, and Pitolet, who rolled a cigarette, seemed full of uncontrollable mirth. He turned to the copying-clerk:

"Papa Savon, you have learned many things in your time, haven't you?"

The old man, knowing they meant to tease him and provoke him to speak of his wife, did not reply.

Pitolet began: "You must have discovered the secret of begetting children, as you have had some."

The old clerk raised his head. "You know, Monsieur Pitolet, that I do not like any joking on this subject. I have had the misfortune to marry an unworthy woman, and when I became convinced of her faithlessness I separated from her."

Maze asked in an indifferent tone: "You have had several proofs of her infidelity, have you not?"

And the old man gravely replied: "I have."

Pitolet spoke again: "That has not prevented you from becoming the father of three or four children, I am told."

The poor old man, growing very red, stammered: "You are trying to wound me, Monsieur Pitolet; but you will not succeed. My wife has had three children. I have reason to believe that the eldest is mine, but I deny the other two."

Pitolet continued: "Everybody says, in truth, that the first one is yours. That is sufficient. It is very gratifying to have a child, very gratifying and very delightful. I wager Lesable there would be enchanted to have one—only one, like you."

Cachelin had stopped registering. He did not laugh, although old Savon was his butt ordinarily, and he had poured out his stock of cruel jokes on the old clerk's conjugal sorrows.

Lesable had collected his papers; but feeling himself attacked he wished to remain, held back by pride, confused and irritated, and wishing to know who had betrayed his secret.

Then the recollection of the confidence he had made to his chief came back to him, and he at once understood that he must express his indignation if he did not wish to become the butt of the whole ministry.

Boissel marched up and down the room, all the

time tittering. He imitated the hoarse voices of the street criers, and bellowed: "The secret of begetting children, for ten centimes—two sous! Buy the secret of begetting children—revealed by Monsieur Savon, with many horrible details." Everybody began to laugh except Lesable and his father-in-law, and Pitolet, turning toward the order-clerk, said: "What is the matter with you, Cachelin? You appear to have lost your habitual gayety. One would think you do not find it amusing to believe that Father Savon could have had a child by his wife. As for me, I find it very funny. It is not everybody that can do as much."

Lesable pretended to be deeply absorbed in his papers and to hear nothing of what was going on about him, but he was as white as a ghost.

Boissel took up the strain in the same mocking voice: "The utility of heirs for getting an inheritance, ten centimes, two sous; who will buy?"

Then Maze, who thought this was a very poor sort of wit, and who personally was enraged at Lesable for having robbed him of the hope of a fortune which he had secretly cherished, said: "What is the matter with you, Lesable? You are very pale."

Lesable raised his head and looked his colleague full in the face. He hesitated a second, while his lip trembled as he tried to formulate a bitter reply, but, unable to find the appropriate phrase, he responded: "Nothing is the matter with me. I am

only astonished that you display so much delicacy."

Maze, who stood with his back to the fire and his hands under his coat-tails, replied, laughing: "One does the best one can, my dear. We are like you, we do not always succeed—"

An explosion of laughter interrupted his words. Father Savon, who now vaguely comprehended that the clerks no longer addressed their raillery to him, looked round with his mouth open and his pen suspended in the air. And Cachelin waited, ready to come to blows with the first that came in his way.

Lesable stammered: "I do not understand. In what have I not succeeded?"

The handsome Maze dropped the tails of his coat, and began to stroke his moustache. "I know that you ordinarily succeed in all that you undertake. I have done wrong to speak of you. Besides, it is the question of Father Savon's children, and not of yours, as you haven't any. Now since you succeed in all your enterprises, it is evident that, if you do not have children, it is because you do not want them."

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Lesable sharply.

At this provoking tone Maze in his turn raised his voice: "Hold on! what do you take me for? Try to be polite, or you will have an affair with me!"

Lesable trembled with anger, and losing all self-control replied: "Monsieur Maze, I am not, like

you, a puppy, or a coxcomb. And I forbid you ever to speak to me again. I care neither for you nor for your kind." And he threw a look of defiance at Pitolet and Boissel.

Maze suddenly comprehended that true force is in calmness and irony, but, wounded in his most vulnerable part—his vanity—he wished to strike his enemy to the very heart, and replied in the protecting tone of a benevolent well-wisher, but with rage in his eyes: "My dear Lesable, you pass all bounds. But I understand your vexation. It is pitiful to lose a fortune, and to lose it for so little, for a thing so easy, so simple. If you wish, I will render you this service myself for nothing, out of pure friendship. It is only an affair of five minutes—"

He was still speaking when Lesable hurled the inkstand of Father Savon full at his head.

A flood of ink covered his face and instantly metamorphosed him into a negro. He sprang forward, rolling the whites of his eyes, with his hands raised ready to strike. But Cachelin covered his son-in-law, and grasping Maze by the arms pushed him aside, and, after pounding him well, dashed him against the wall. Maze disengaged himself with a violent effort, and rushed through the door, crying to the two men: "You shall soon hear from me!" Pitolet and Boissel followed him.

Boissel explained his moderation by declaring he should have killed some one if he had taken part in the struggle.

Entering his room, Maze endeavored to remove the stain, but without success. The ink was violet, and was ineffaceable. He stood before his glass, furious and disconsolate, rubbing savagely at his face with a napkin rolled in a knot. He obtained only a richer black, the blood coming to the surface with the friction.

Boissel and Pitolet strove to advise and console him. One suggested the application of pure olive oil, the other prescribed a bath of ammonia. The office-boy was sent to ask the advice of an apothecary. He brought back a yellow liquid and some pumice stone, which were used with no result.

Maze, disheartened, sank into a chair and declared: "Now it only remains to settle the question of honor. Will you act as seconds for me, and demand of Monsieur Lesable a sufficient apology, or the reparation of arms?"

Both promptly consented, and began to discuss the steps to be taken. They had no idea about affairs of this kind, but not wishing to betray their ignorance, and desiring to appear correct, their opinions were timid and conflicting. It was finally decided that they should consult the captain of a detached frigate at the ministry. But he was as ignorant as they. After some moments of reflection, however, he advised them to see Lesable and ask to be put in communication with two of his friends.

As they proceeded to the bureau of their col-

league, Boissel suddenly stopped. "Is it not imperative that we should go gloved?" he asked.

Pitolet hesitated an instant. "Perhaps it is," he replied seriously. "But to procure the gloves it would be necessary to go out, and the chief would permit no nonsense."

They sent the office-boy to bring an assortment from the nearest glove-store. To decide upon the color was a question of time. Boissel preferred black. Pitolet thought that shade out of place in the circumstances. At last they chose violet.

Seeing the two men enter gloved and solemn, Lesable raised his head and brusquely demanded: "What do you want?"

Pitolet replied: "Monsieur, we are charged by our friend, Monsieur Maze, to ask of you an apology, or a reparation by arms for the insult you have inflicted on him."

Lesable, still greatly exasperated, cried: "What, he insults me, and sends you to provoke me further? Tell him that I despise him—despise all he can say or do."

Boissel advanced with a tragic air. "You will force us, Monsieur, to publish in the papers an official report, which will be very disagreeable to you."

Pitolet maliciously added: "And will gravely injure your honor and your future advancement."

Lesable, overwhelmed, looked at them. What should he do? He sought to gain time. "Will you wait a moment in the bureau of Monsieur Pitolet?

You shall have my response in ten minutes, Monsieur."

When at last alone he looked around him, seeking for some counsel, some protection, or help.

A duel! He was going to fight a duel!

He sat terrified, with a beating heart. He, a peaceful man, who never had dreamed of such a possibility, who was not prepared for the risk, whose courage was not equal to such a formidable event. He rose from his chair and sat down again, his heart beating wildly, his legs shaking. Both his anger and his strength had deserted him.

But the thought of the opinion of the ministry, the gossip the story would make among his acquaintances, aroused his failing pride, and, not knowing what to resolve, he sought his chief to ask advice. Monsieur Torchebeuf was surprised and perplexed. An armed encounter seemed to him unnecessary, and he thought a duel would demoralize the service. He replied: "I can give you no advice. It is a question of honor, which does not concern me. Do you wish that I should give you a note to Commandant Bouc? He is a competent man in such matters, and will be able to direct you."

Lesable accepted the offer, and saw the commandant, who even consented to be his second; he took an under-chief for another.

Boissel and Pitolet waited with their gloves on. They had hired two vehicles in order to have four seats.

They saluted gravely and took their places, while

Pitolet explained the situation. The commandant, having listened attentively, replied: "The case is serious, but it does not appear to me to be irreparable. Everything depends on the intention." He was a sly old sailor, who wished to amuse himself.

A long discussion began regarding the reciprocal apologies the principals should make. Monsieur Maze acknowledging not to have had the intention to offend, Monsieur Lesable should hasten to avow himself in the wrong in throwing the inkstand at the head of Monsieur Maze, and pray to be excused for his inconsiderate violence.

The four seconds returned to their principals.

Maze, seated before his table, was agitated by the dread of the possible duel, although expecting to see his adversary retreat, and regarded his face attentively in one of those little, round pewter mirrors which the employees concealed in a drawer for the purpose of adjusting their hair and cravats before leaving in the evening. He read the letter of apology which had been prepared by the seconds of both parties, and declared with evident satisfaction: "That appears to me to be very honorable; I am willing to sign it."

Lesable, for his part, accepted without discussion the arrangement of his seconds, and declared: "As this is the result of your consultation, I can but acquiesce."

The four plenipotentiaries assembled. The letters were exchanged, they saluted gravely, and so

the affair ended. An extraordinary excitement reigned in the ministry. The employees, carrying the news, passed from one door to the other, and lingered in the lobbies to gossip about it. When they heard how the affair had ended, there was general disappointment. Some one said: "Still, that will not get Lesable a baby." And the saying took. One employee made a rhyme upon it.

But when everything seemed adjusted, a difficulty suggested itself to Boissel: "What would be the attitude of the two adversaries when they found themselves face-to-face? Would they speak, or would they ignore each other?" It was decided that they should meet, as if by chance, in the bureau of the chief, and exchange, in the presence of Monsieur Torchebeuf, some words of politeness.

This ceremony was accomplished, and Maze returned home in a carriage, and endeavored to remove the stain from his face.

Lesable and Cachelin drove home together without speaking, each blaming the other for the disgraceful affair.

The moment he entered the house, Lesable threw his hat violently on the table and cried to his wife: "I have had enough of it! I have a duel on your account now!" She looked at him in angry surprise.

"A duel? How is that?"

"Because Maze has insulted me on your account."

She approached him. "On my account? How?"

He threw himself into an armchair and exclaimed: "He has insulted me—there is no need of dilating upon it."

But she would know. "I intend that you shall repeat to me the words he used about me."

Lesable blushed, and then stammered: "He told me—he told me—it was in regard to your sterility."

She gave a start; then recoiling in fury, the paternal rudeness transpiercing the woman's nature, she burst out:

"Me! I am sterile, am I? What does that clown know about it? Sterile with you, yes; because you are not a man. But if I had married another—no matter who, do you hear?—I should have had children. Ah, you had better talk! It has cost me dear to have married a cipher like you! And what did you reply to this beggar?"

Lesable, frightened before this storm, stuttered: "I—I slapped his face."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"And what did he do?"

"He sent me a challenge; that was all."

She was instantly interested, attracted, like all women, by the dramatic element, and she asked, immediately softened, and suddenly seized with a sort of esteem for this man who was going to risk his life for her sake:

"When are you going to fight him?"

He replied tranquilly: "We are not going to fight; the matter has been arranged by our seconds. Maze has sent me an apology."

Transported with rage, she boxed his ears. "Ah, he insults me in your presence, and you permit it, and refuse to fight him! It needed but this to make you a poltroon."

Enraged at this he cried: "I command you to hold your tongue. I know better than you do how to protect my honor. To convince you, here is the letter of Monsieur Maze; read it, and see for yourself."

She took the letter, ran her eye over it, and divining the whole truth, sneered: "You wrote him a letter also? You are afraid of each other. What cowards men are! If we were in your place, we women—after all, it is I who have been insulted, your wife, and you are willing to let it pass. That does not astonish me, for you are not man enough to beget a child. That explains everything. You are as impotent before women as you are cowardly among men. Ah, I have married a pretty coco!"

She had suddenly assumed the voice and gestures of her father, the coarse and vulgar manners of an old trooper, and the intonations of a man.

Standing before him, her hands on her hips, tall, strong, vigorous, her chest protruding, her cheeks flushed, her voice deep and vibrant, she looked at this little man seated in front of her, a trifle bald, clean shaven except for the short side-whiskers of the advocate, and she felt a desire to crush, to strangle him.

She continued: "You are capable of nothing—

of nothing whatever! You allow everybody at the ministry, even, to be promoted over your head!"

The door opened, and Cachelin entered, attracted by the sound of their voices, and demanded to know what was the matter. "I have told the truth to that sparrow there," answered Cora.

Lesable raised his eyes, and for the first time noticed the resemblance between father and daughter. It seemed to him that a veil was lifted and the pair were revealed in their true colors—the same coarse nature was common to both; and he, a ruined man, was condemned to live between the two forever.

Cachelin exclaimed: "If you only could get a divorce! It is not very satisfactory to have married a capon."

At that word, trembling and blazing with fury, Lesable sprang up with a bound. He rushed at his father-in-law shouting: "Get out of here! Begone! You are in my house—do you understand?—and I order you to leave it." He seized from the table a bottle of sedative water and brandished it like a club.

Cachelin, intimidated, backed out of the room, muttering: "What will he do next, I wonder?"

But Lesable was too angry to be easily appeased. He turned upon his wife, who regarded this outburst in astonishment, and placing the bottle on the table cried: "As for you—as for you—" But words failed him to express his rage, he was choked into

silence, and stood glaring at her with a distorted visage.

She began to laugh, and this mocking laughter put him beside himself. Springing upon her, he seized her by the throat with his left hand, while he boxed her ears furiously with the right. She recoiled, terrified and suffocating, and fell backward on the bed, while he continued to strike her. Suddenly he raised himself, out of breath, exhausted and heartily ashamed of his brutality, and stammered: "There—there—there—that will do!"

But she did not move; it seemed as if he had killed her. She lay on her back, on the side of the bed, her face concealed by her hands.

He approached her in alarm, wondering what had happened, and expecting her to uncover her face and look at him. She made no sign, and suspense becoming intolerable he murmured: "Cora, Cora, speak!" But she did not move or reply.

His rage had passed—fallen as suddenly as it had been aroused. He felt that his conduct was odious, almost criminal. He had beaten his wife, his own wife—he who was circumspect, cold, and courteous. And in the compassion that his remorse awakened, he would ask her forgiveness. He threw himself on his knees at her side and covered with kisses the cheek he had just smitten. He softly touched the end of a finger of the hand that covered her face. She seemed to feel nothing. He coaxed her, caressing her as one caresses a beaten dog. She took no

notice of him. "Cora, listen: I have done wrong! Cora, hear me!" She seemed as one dead. Then he tried to take her hand from her face. It obeyed his effort passively, and he saw an open eye, which stared at him with a fixed and alarming gaze.

He continued: "Listen, Cora, I was transported with fury. It was your father who drove me to do this shameful thing. A man cannot take such an insult as that." She made no reply, as if she heard nothing. He did not know what to say, or what to do. He kissed her under the ear, and raising himself he saw a tear in the corner of her eye, a great tear which rolled slowly down her cheek, and her eyelids fluttered and closed convulsively. He was seized with shame, penetrated with emotion, and opening his arms he threw himself on his wife; he removed the other hand from her face and covered it with kisses, crying: "My poor Cora, forgive me! forgive me!"

She wept continually, without a sound, without a sob, as one weeps from the deepest grief. He held her pressed closely against him, caressing her and whispering in her ear all the tender words he could command. But she remained insensible. However, she ceased to weep. They continued thus a long time locked in each other's arms.

The night fell, folding in its somber shadow the little chamber; and when the room was entirely dark he was emboldened to solicit her pardon in a manner that was calculated to revive their hopes.

When they had risen he resumed his ordinary voice and manner, as if nothing had happened. She, on the contrary, appeared softened, and spoke in a gentler tone than usual, regarding her husband with submissive, almost caressing eyes, as if this unexpected correction had relaxed her nerves and softened her heart.

Lesable said quietly: "Your father must be tired of being alone so long. It will soon be dinner-time; go and fetch him."

She obeyed him.

It was seven o'clock indeed, and the little maid announced dinner, as Cachelin, serene and smiling, appeared with his daughter. They seated themselves at table and on this evening talked with more cordiality than they had done for a long time, as if something agreeable had happened to everybody.

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But their hopes, always cherished, always renewed, ended in nothing. From month to month their expectations declined, in spite of the persistence of Lesable and the co-operation of his wife. They were consumed with anxiety. Each without ceasing reproached the other for their want of success, and the husband in despair, emaciated, fatigued, had to suffer all the vulgarity of Cachelin, who in their domestic warfare called him "Monsieur Lecoq," in remembrance, no doubt, of the day

that he missed receiving a bottle in his face for having called his son-in-law a capon.

He and his daughter, whose interests were in league, enraged by the constant thought of this great fortune so near, and yet impossible to seize, racked their invention to humiliate and torture this impotent man, who was the cause of their misfortune.

As they sat at table, Cora repeated each day: "There is very little for dinner. If we were rich, it would be otherwise. It is not my fault."

When Lesable set out for his office, she called from her chamber: "Do not forget your umbrella or you will come back as muddy as an omnibus wheel. It's not my fault that you are still obliged to follow the trade of paper-scratcher."

When she went out herself, she never failed to cry: "If I had married another man, I should have a carriage of my own."

Every hour and on every occasion she harped on this subject. She pricked her husband with reproaches, lashed him with insult, held him alone culpable, and made him responsible for the loss of the fortune that should have been hers.

At last, one evening, losing all patience, Lesable exclaimed: "In the dog's name, can't you hold your tongue? From first to last it is your fault, and yours alone, do you hear, if we have not a child, because I have already had one."

He lied, preferring anything to this eternal re-

proach, to this shame of appearing impotent. She looked at him, astonished, seeking the truth in his eyes; at last, comprehending, and full of disdain, she cried: "You have a child, have you?"

He replied with effrontery: "Yes, an illegitimate child, that I am bringing up at Asnières."

She answered quietly: "We will go and see it to-morrow, so that I may find out how it is done."

He blushed to the ears and stammered: "Just as you please."

She rose the next morning at seven o'clock, much to her husband's astonishment.

"Are we not going to see your child? You promised me yesterday evening. Perhaps you haven't got it any more to-day."

He sprang from the bed hastily. "It is not my child we are going to see, but a physician, who will give us his opinion on your case."

She replied in the tone of a woman who was sure of herself: "I shall ask nothing better."

Cachelin was instructed to inform the chief that his son-in-law was ill, and Lesable and his wife, recommended by a neighboring druggist, rang at a certain hour the office-bell of Dr. Lefilleul, author of several works on the hygiene of generation.

They were shown into a salon decorated in white and gold, but scantily furnished in spite of the number of chairs and sofas. They seated themselves and waited. Lesable was excited, trembling and ashamed. Their turn came at last, and they were

shown into a sort of bureau, where they were received by a short, stout man of dignified and ceremonious demeanor.

He waited till they should explain their case, but Lesable had not courage to utter a word, and blushed up to the roots of his hair. It therefore devolved on his wife to speak, and with a resolute manner and in a tranquil voice, she made known their errand.

"Monsieur, we have come to discover the reason why we cannot have children. A large fortune depends upon this for us."

The consultation was long, minute, and painful. Cora alone seemed unembarrassed, and submitted to the critical examination of the medical expert, sustained by the great interest she had at stake.

After studying the constitutions of the married pair nearly two hours, the practitioner said: I discover nothing either abnormal or special. Your case is by no means uncommon. There is as much divergence in constitutions as in characters. When we see so many households out of joint through incompatibility of temper, it is not astonishing to see others sterile through incompatibility of physique. Madame appears to be particularly well fitted for the offices of maternity. Monsieur, on his side, although presenting no conformation outside of the general rule, seems to me enfeebled, perhaps the consequence of his ardent desire to become a parent. Will you permit me to make an auscultation?"

Lesable, greatly disturbed, removed his waistcoat, and the doctor glued his ear to the thorax, and then to the back of his patient, tapping him continuously from the throat to the stomach, and from the loins to the nape of his neck. He discovered a slight irregularity in the action of the heart, and a menace to the right lung. "You must be careful, Monsieur, very careful. This is *anæmia,* and comes from exhaustion—nothing else. These conditions, although now insignificant, may soon become incurable."

Lesable turned pale with anguish and asked for a prescription.

The doctor ordered a complicated *régime* consisting of iron, raw meat, and *bouillon,* combined with exercise, rest, and a sojourn in the country during the hot weather. He indicated, moreover, the symptoms that proclaimed the desired fecundity, and initiated them into the secrets that were usually practised with success in such cases.

The consultation cost forty francs.

When they were in the street, Cora burst out full of wrath:

"I have discovered what my fate is to be!"

Lesable made no reply. He was tormented by anxiety, he was recalling and weighing each word of the physician. Had the doctor made a mistake, or had he judged truly? He thought no more of the inheritance now, or the desired offspring; it was a question of life or death. He seemed to hear a whistling in his lungs, and his heart sounded as

if it were beating in his ears. In crossing the garden of the Tuileries he was overcome with faintness and had to sit down to recover himself. His wife, as if to humiliate him by her superior strength, remained standing in front of him, regarding him from head to foot with pitying contempt. He breathed heavily, exaggerating the effort by his fears, and with the fingers of his left hand on his right wrist he counted the pulsations of the artery.

Cora, who was stamping with impatience, cried: "When will you be ready? It's time to stop this nonsense!" He arose with the air of a martyr, and went on his way without uttering a word.

When Cachelin was informed of the result of the consultation, his fury knew no bounds. He bawled out: "We know now whose fault it is to a certainty. Ah, well!" And he looked at his son-in-law as if he would devour him.

Lesable neither listened nor heard, being totally absorbed in thoughts of his health and the menace to his existence. Father and daughter might say what they pleased. They were not in his skin, and as for him he meant to preserve his skin at all hazards. He had the various prescriptions of the physician filled, and at each meal he produced an array of bottles with the contents of which he dosed himself regardless of the sneers of his wife and her father. He looked at himself in the glass frequently, placed his hand on his heart to study its action, and removed his chamber to a remote part

of the house, to put himself beyond the reach of carnal temptation.

He conceived for his wife a hatred mingled with contempt and disgust. All women, moreover, appeared to him to be monsters, dangerous beasts, whose mission it was to destroy men; and he thought no more of the will of Aunt Charlotte, except as one recalls an accident that might have been fatal.

Some months passed. But one year remained before the fatal term.

Cachelin had suspended in the dining-room an enormous calendar, from which he effaced a day each morning, raging at the impotence of his son-in-law, who was allowing this great fortune to escape week by week. And the thought that he would have to drudge at the bureau all his life, and limit his expenses to the pitiful sum of two thousand francs a year, filled him with anger that found vent in the most violent abuse. He could not look at Lesable without a brutal desire to beat, to crush, to trample on him. He hated him with an inordinate hatred. Every time he saw him open the door and enter the room, it seemed to him that a robber had broken into the house and robbed him of a sacred inheritance. He hated him more than his most mortal enemy, and he despised him at the same time for his weakness, and above all for the baseness which caused him to sacrifice their common hope of posterity to the fear of his health.

Lesable, in fact, lived as completely apart from his wife as if no tie united them. He never approached or touched her; he avoided even looking at her, as much through a feeling of shame as through fear.

Cachelin, every morning asked his daughter: "Well, how about your husband? Has he made up his mind?"

And she would reply: "No, papa."

Each evening the most painful scenes took place at table. Cachelin continually reiterated: "When a man is not a man, he had better get out and yield his place to another."

And Cora added: "The fact is, there are some men who are both useless and wearisome. I do not know why they are permitted to live only to become a burden to everyone."

Lesable dosed himself and made no reply. At last one day his father-in-law cried: "Say, you, if you do not change your manners now that your health is improving, do you know what my daughter means to do?"

The son-in-law raised his eyes, foreseeing a new outrage. Cachelin continued: "She will employ some one besides you, *parbleu!* You may consider yourself lucky if she hasn't done so already. When a girl has married a titmouse like you, she is entitled to do anything."

Lesable, turning livid with wrath, replied: "It is not I who prevent her from following your good counsel."

Cora lowered her eyes, and Cachelin, knowing that he had said an outrageous thing, remained silent and confused.

VI

At the bureau the two men seemed to live on good enough terms. A sort of tacit pact was entered into between them to conceal their warfare from their colleagues. They addressed each other as "my dear Cachelin," "my dear Lesable"; they even feigned to laugh and talk together as men who were satisfied and happy in their domestic relations.

Lesable and Maze, for their part, comported themselves in the presence of each other with the ceremonious politeness of adversaries who had met in battle.

The duel they had escaped, but whose shadow had chilled them, exacted of them an exaggerated courtesy, a more marked consideration, and perhaps a secret desire for reconciliation, born of the vague fear of a new complication. Their attitude was recognized and approved as that of men of the world, who had had an affair of honor. They saluted each other from a distance with severe gravity, and with a flourish of hats that was graceful and dignified. They did not speak, their pride preventing either from making the first advances. But one day, Lesable, whom the chief demanded to see immediately,

to show his zeal, started with a great rush through the lobby and ran right into the stomach of an employee. It was Maze. They recoiled before each other, and Lesable exclaimed with eager politeness:

"I hope I have not hurt you, Monsieur?"

Maze responded: "Not at all, sir."

From this moment they thought it expedient to exchange some phrases when they met. Then, in the interchange of courtesies, they paid each other little attentions, from which arose in a short time certain familiarities, then an intimacy tempered with reserve and restrained by a certain hesitation; then on the strength of their increasing good-will and visits made to the room of each other, a comradeship was established. They often gossiped together now of the news that found its way into the bureau. Lesable laid aside his air of superiority, and Maze no longer paraded his social successes. Cachelin often joined in the conversation and watched with interest their growing friendship. Sometimes as the handsome Maze left the apartment with head erect and square shoulders, he turned to his son-in-law and hissed: "There goes a fine gallant!" One morning when all four were together, for Father Savon never left his copying, the chair of the old clerk, having been tampered with by some practical joker, collapsed under him, and the good man rolled on the floor uttering cries of affright. The three others flew to his assistance. The order-clerk attributed this machination to the communists, and

Maze earnestly desired to see the wounded part. Cachelin and he even essayed to take off the poor old fellow's clothes to dress the injury, they said, but he resisted, saying that he was not hurt.

When the affair was over, Cachelin suddenly exclaimed: "I say, Monsieur Maze, now that we are all together, can you not do us the honor of dining with us next Sunday? It will give pleasure to all three of us, myself, my son-in-law, and my daughter, who has often heard your name when we speak of the bureau. Shall it be yes?"

Lesable added his entreaty, but not so warmly as his father-in-law:

"Pray come," he said; "it will give us great pleasure."

Maze hesitated, embarrassed and smiling at the remembrance of past events.

Cachelin urged him: "Come, say we may expect you!"

"Very well, then, I accept."

On entering the house, Cachelin said: "Cora, do you know that Monsieur Maze is coming here to dinner next Sunday? "

Cora, surprised at first, stammered: "Monsieur Maze? Really!" She blushed up to her hair without knowing why. She had so often heard him spoken of, his manners and his successes (for he passed in the bureau for a man who was irresistible with women), that she had long desired to know him.

Cachelin continued rubbing his hands: "You will see that he is a genuine man, and a fine fellow. He is as tall as a carbineer; he does not resemble your husband there."

She was confused as if they had divined her dreams of him and made no reply.

They prepared this dinner with as much solicitude as the one to which Lesable had been formerly invited. Cachelin discussed the dishes, wishing to have everything served in perfection; and as if a confidence unavowed and still undetermined had risen in his heart, he seemed more gay, tranquillized by some secret and sure prevision.

Through all that Sunday he watched the preparations with the utmost solicitude, while Lesable pretended that some urgent business, unfinished the evening before, drew him to the bureau.

It was the first week of November, and the new year was at hand.

At seven o'clock Maze arrived, in high good humor. He entered as if he felt very much at home, with a compliment and a great bouquet of roses for Cora. He added, as he presented them, in the familiar tone of a man of the world: "It seems to me, Madame, I know you already, and that I have known you from your childhood, for these many years your father has spoken to me of you."

Cachelin, perceiving the flowers, said: "Ah, they are charming!" and his daughter recalled the fact that Lesable had not brought her a bouquet the

day of his presentation. The handsome clerk seemed enchanted, laughing like a boy at home on his vacation, and bestowing on Cora the most delicate flatteries, which made her blush.

He found her very attractive. She thought him charming and seductive. When he had gone, Cachelin exclaimed: "Isn't he a fine boy? What havoc he ought to make! He can wheedle any woman!"

Cora, less demonstrative, avowed, however, that she thought him very agreeable, and not so much of a *poseur* as she had believed.

Lesable, who appeared less sad and weary than usual, acknowledged that he had underrated Maze on his first acquaintance.

Maze returned at intervals, which gradually grew shorter. He delighted everybody. They petted and coddled him. Cora prepared for him the dishes he liked, and the intimacy of the three men soon became so great that they were seldom seen apart.

The new friend took the whole family to the theater on tickets procured from the press. They returned on foot, through the streets thronged with people, to the door of Lesable's apartments, Maze and Cora walking before, keeping step, hip to hip, swinging with the same movement, the same rhythm, like two beings created to walk side by side through life. They spoke to each other in a low tone, laughing softly together, and seemed to understand each other instinctively; sometimes the young woman would turn her head and throw back a glance at her husband and father.

Cachelin followed them with a look of benevolent regard, and often, forgetting that he spoke to his son-in-law, he declared: "They have the same physique exactly. It is a pleasure to see them together."

Lesable replied quietly: "Yes, they are about the same figure." He was happy now in the consciousness that his heart beat more vigorously, that his lungs acted more freely, and that his health had improved in every respect; his rancor against his father-in-law, whose cruel taunts had now ceased, vanished little by little.

On the first day of January he was promoted to the chief clerkship. His joy was so excessive over this happy event that on returning home he embraced his wife for the first time in six months. She appeared embarrassed, as if he had done something improper, and she looked at Maze, who had called to present to her his devotion and respect on the first day of the year. He also had an embarrassed air, and turned toward the window, like a man who does not wish to see.

But Cachelin very soon resumed his brutalities, and harassed his son-in-law with coarse jests. Sometimes he even attacked Maze, as if he blamed him also for the impending catastrophe—the inevitable date of which approached nearer every minute. Cora alone appeared composed, entirely happy and radiant. She had forgotten, it seemed, the menacing nearness of the term. March came. All hope

seemed lost, for on the twentieth of July it would be three years since Aunt Charlotte's death.

An early spring had advanced the vegetation, and Maze proposed to his friends one Sunday to make an excursion to the banks of the Seine, to gather the violets in the shady places. They set out by a morning train and alighted at Maisons-Laffitte. A breath of winter still lingered among the bare branches, but the turf was green and lustrous, flecked with flowers of white and blue, and the fruit-trees on the hillsides seemed garlanded with roses as their bare branches showed through the clustering blossoms. The Seine, thick and muddy from the late rains, flowed slowly between its banks gnawed by the frosts of winter; and all the country, steeped in vapor, exhaled a savor of sweet humidity under the warmth of the first days of spring.

They wandered in the park. Cachelin, more glum than usual, tapped with his cane on the graveled walk, thinking bitterly of their misfortune, so soon to be irremediable. Lesable, morose also, feared to wet his feet in the grass, while his wife and Maze were gathering flowers to make a bouquet. Cora for several days had seemed suffering, and looked weary and pale. She was soon fatigued and wished to return for luncheon. They came upon a little restaurant near an old ruined mill, and the traditional repast of a Parisian picnic party was soon served under a green arbor on a little table covered with two napkins, and quite near the banks of the

river. They had croquettes of fried gudgeons, and roast beef cooked with potatoes, and they had come to the salad of fresh green lettuce, when Cora rose suddenly and ran toward the river, pressing her napkin with both hands to her mouth.

Lesable, uneasy, wondered what could be the matter. Maze disconcerted, blushed, and stammered, "I do not know—she was well a moment since."

Cachelin appeared frightened, and remained seated, with his fork in the air, a leaf of salad suspended at the end. Then he rose, trying to see his daughter. Bending forward, he perceived her leaning against a tree and seeming very ill. A swift suspicion flashed through his mind, and he fell back into his seat and with an embarrassed air regarded the two men, both of whom seemed now equally confused. He looked at them with anxious eyes, no longer daring to speak, wild with anguish and hope.

A quarter of an hour passed in utter silence. Then Cora reappeared, a little pale and walking slowly. No one questioned her; each seemed to divine a happy event, difficult to speak of. Cachelin alone had the courage to ask: "You are better now?" And she replied: "Yes, thank you; there is not much the matter; but we will return early, as I have a slight headache." When they set out she took the arm of her husband, as if to signify something mysterious that she had not yet dared to avow.

They separated at the station of Saint-Lazare. Maze, making a pretext of some business affair which he had just remembered, bade them adieu, after pressing all their hands; and as soon as Cachelin was alone with his daughter and his son-in-law, he asked: "What was the matter with you at breakfast?"

Cora did not reply at first; but after hesitating for a moment she said: "It was nothing much; a little sickness of the stomach was all." She walked with a languid step, but with a smile on her lips.

Lesable was ill at ease, his mind distracted; haunted with confused and contradictory ideas, angry, feeling an unavowable shame, cherishing a cowardly jealousy, he was like those sleepers who close their eyes in the morning that they may not see the ray of light which glides between the curtains and strikes the bed like a brillant shaft.

As soon as he entered the house, he shut himself in his own room, pretending to be occupied with some unfinished business. Then Cachelin, placing his hands on his daughter's shoulders, exclaimed: "You are *enceinte;* is it not so?"

She stammered: "Yes, I think so. For two months."

Before she had finished speaking he bounded with joy, then began to dance the *cancan* around her, an old recollection of his garrison days. He made the whole apartment shake with his gambols. The furniture jostled, the glasses on the buffet

rattled, and the chandelier oscillated like the lamp of a ship.

He took his beloved daughter in his arms and embraced her frantically. Then tapping her lightly on the shoulder he cried: "Ah, it is done, then, at last! Have you told your husband?"

She murmured, suddenly intimidated: "No— not yet—I—I—was waiting—"

But Cachelin exclaimed: "Good, very good. You find it awkward. I will run and tell him myself." And he rushed to the apartment of his son-in-law. Lesable, who was doing nothing, rose and looked inquiringly at Cachelin, who left him no time for conjecture, but cried: "Do you know your wife is in a delicate condition?"

The husband was stricken speechless, his countenance changed, and the blood surged to the roots of his hair: "What? How? Cora? you say—" he faltered when he recovered his voice.

"I say that she is *enceinte;* do you understand? Now is your chance!"

In his joy he took Lesable's hands and pressed and shook them, as if to felicitate him, to thank him, and cried: "Ah, at last it is true, it is true! it is true! Think of the fortune we shall have!" and unable to contain himself longer, he caught his son-in-law in his arms and embraced him, crying: "More than a million! think of it! more than a million!" and he began to dance more violently than ever.

"But come, she is waiting for you, come and embrace her, at least," and taking him by the shoulders he pushed Lesable before him, and threw him like a ball into the apartment where Cora stood anxiously waiting and listening.

The moment she saw her husband, she recoiled, stifled with a sudden emotion. He stood before her, pale and severe. He had the air of a judge, and she of a culprit. At last he said: "It seems that you are *enceinte?*"

She stammered in a trembling voice: "Yes, that seems to be the case."

But Cachelin seized each of them by the neck, and, bringing them face to face, cried: "Now kiss each other, in the dog's name! It is well worth the trouble."

And after releasing them, he capered about like a schoolboy, shouting: "Victory, victory, we have gained our case! Say, Leopold, we must purchase a country seat; there, at least, you will certainly recover your health." At this idea Lesable trembled. His father-in-law continued: "We will invite Monsieur Torchebeuf and his wife to visit us, and as the under-chief is at the end of his term you may succeed to his place. That is the way to bring it about."

Lesable was now beginning to regard things from Cachelin's standpoint, and he saw himself receiving his chief at a beautiful country place on the banks of the river, dressed in an outfit of white flannel, with a Panama hat on his head.

Something sweet entered into his heart with this hope, something warm and good seemed to melt within him, rendering him light of heart and healthier in feeling. He smiled, still without speaking.

Cachelin, intoxicated with joy, transported at the thought of his fine prospects, continued:

"Who knows, we may gain some political influence. Perhaps you will be deputy. At all events, we can see the society of the neighborhood, and pay them our *devoirs*. And you shall have a little pony chaise to convey you every morning to the station."

These images of luxury, of elegance and prosperity, aroused the drooping spirits of Lesable. The thought that he could be driven in his own carriage, like the rich people he had so often envied, filled him with satisfaction, and he could not refrain from exclaiming: "Ah, that will be delightful indeed."

Cora, seeing him won over, smiled tenderly and gratefully, and Cachelin, who saw no obstacles now in the way of indulgence, declared: "We will dine at the restaurant, to celebrate the happy event."

When they reached home, after dinner, the two men were a little tipsy, and Lesable, who saw double and whose ideas were all topsy-turvy, could not find his bed-chamber. He made his way by mistake, or forgetfulness, into the long vacant bed of his wife. And all night long it seemed to him that the bed oscillated like a boat, rolling and pitching as if it would upset. He was even a little seasick.

He was surprised on awaking to find Cora in his arms. She opened her eyes with a smile and kissed him with a sudden effusion of gratitude and affection. Then she said to him in that caressing voice which women employ in their cajoleries: "If you wish to be very nice, you will not go to your bureau to-day. There is no need to be so punctual now that we are going to be rich, and we will make a little visit to the country, all by ourselves."

Lesable was content to remain quiet, with the feeling for self-indulgence which follows an evening of excess, and the warmth of the bed was grateful. He felt the drowsy wish to lie a long time, to do nothing more but to live in tranquil idleness. An unusual sloth paralyzed his soul and subdued his body, and one vague, happy, and continuous thought never left him—"He was going to be rich, independent."

But suddenly a fear seized him, and he whispered softly, as if he thought the walls might hear him: "Are you very sure you are pregnant, after all?"

She reassured him at once. "Oh, yes! I am certain of it. I could not be mistaken."

And, as if still doubting, he traced the outline of her figure with his hand, and feeling convinced declared: "Yes, it is true—but you will not be brought to bed before the date. They will contest our right on that account, perhaps."

At this supposition she grew angry.

"Oh, no indeed, they are not going to trick us

now after so much misery, so much trouble, and so many efforts. Oh, no, indeed!" She was overwhelmed with indignation. "Let us go at once to the notary," she said.

But his advice was to get a physician's certificate first, and they presented themselves again to Dr. Lefilleul.

He recognized them immediately, and exclaimed: "Ah, well, have you succeeded?"

They both blushed up to their ears, and Cora a little shamefacedly stammered: "I believe we have, doctor."

The doctor rubbed his hands, saying: "I expected it, I expected it. The means I recommended to you never fail; at least, only from some radical incapacity of one of the parties."

When he had made an examination of the young wife, he declared: "It is true, bravo!" and he wrote on a sheet of paper:

"I, the undersigned, doctor of medicine, of the Faculty of Paris, certify that Madame Leopold Lesable, *née* Cachelin, presents all the symptoms of pregnancy, dating from about three months."

Then, turning toward Lesable: "And you," he said, "how are that chest and that heart?" and having made an auscultation, he declared that the patient was entirely cured. They set out happy and joyous, arm-in-arm, with elastic steps. But on the route Leopold had an idea. "We had better go

home before we see the notary, and rearrange your dress; that will look better and attract his attention; he will not believe then that we are trying to gain time."

They returned home, and he himself undressed his wife in order to adjust the deception. Ten consecutive times Lesable changed the position of his wife's dress, and stepped back some paces to get the proper effect, wishing to obtain an absolutely perfect resemblance. Satisfied with the result at last, they set out again, and walked proudly through the streets, Lesable carrying himself with the air of one whose virility was established and patent to all the world.

The notary received them kindly. Then he listened to their explanation, ran his eye over the certificate, and, as Lesable insisted, "For the rest, Monsieur, it is only necessary to glance for a second," he threw a convinced look on the telltale figure of the young woman.

There was a moment of anxious suspense, when the man of law declared: "Assuredly, whether the infant is born or to be born, it exists, it lives; so we will suspend the execution of the testament till the *accouchement* of Madame."

After leaving the office of the notary, they embraced each other on the stairway, so exuberant was their joy.

From the moment of this happy discovery, the three relatives lived in the most perfect accord.

They were good-humored, reasonable, and kind. Cachelin had recovered all his old gayety, and Cora loaded her husband with attentions. Lesable also seemed like another man, and more gay than he had ever been. Maze came less often, and seemed ill at ease in the family circle; they received him kindly, but with less warmth than formerly, for happiness is egotistical and excludes strangers.

Cachelin himself seemed to feel a certain secret hostility against the handsome clerk whom some months before he had introduced so eagerly into his household. It was he who announced to this friend the pregnancy of Cora. He said to him abruptly: "You know my daughter is *enceinte!*"

Maze, feigning surprise, replied: "Ah, indeed! you ought to be very happy."

Cachelin responded with a "Humph!" for he perceived that his colleague, on the contrary, did not appear to be delighted. Men care but little to see in this state (whether or not the cause lies with them) women in whom they are interested.

Every Sunday, however, Maze continued to dine with the family, but it was no longer pleasant to spend the evenings with them, albeit no serious difference had arisen; and this strange embarrassment increased from week to week. One evening, just after Maze had gone, Cachelin cried with an air of annoyance: "That fellow is beginning to weary me to death!"

Lesable replied: "The fact is, he does not improve

on acquaintance." Cora lowered her eyes. She did not give her opinion. She always seemed embarrassed in the presence of the handsome Maze, who, on his side, appeared almost ashamed when he found himself near her. He no longer smiled on looking at her as formerly, no longer asked her and her husband to accompany him to the theater, and the intimacy, which till lately had been so cordial, seemed to have become an irksome burden.

One Thursday, when her husband came home to dinner, Cora kissed him with more coquetry than usual and whispered in his ear:

"Perhaps you are going to scold me now?"

"Why should I?" he inquired.

"It is that—Monsieur Maze came to see me a little while ago, and, as I do not wish to be gossiped about on his account, I asked him never to present himself here when you were not at home. He seemed a little hurt."

Lesable, very much surprised, demanded:

"Very well, what did he say to that?"

"Oh! he did not say much, but it did not please me all the same, and I then requested him to cease his visits entirely. You know it was you and papa who brought him here—I was not consulted at all about it—and I feared you would be displeased because I had dismissed him."

A grateful joy beamed from the face of her husband.

"You did right, perfectly right, and I even thank you for it."

She continued, in order to establish the understanding between the two men, which she had arranged in advance: "At the bureau you must conduct yourself as if nothing had happened, and speak to him as you have been in the habit of doing; but he is to come here no more."

Taking his wife tenderly in his arms, Lesable impressed long kisses on her eyelids and on her cheeks. "You are an angel! You are an angel!" he repeated, and he felt pressing strongly against him the evidence of their hopes.

VII

Nothing of importance happened up to the date of Cora's confinement, which occurred on the last day of September. The child, being a daughter, was called Désirée. As they wished to make the christening an imposing event, it was decided to postpone the ceremony until they were settled in the new country home which they intended to purchase.

They chose a beautiful estate at Asnières, on the hills that overlook the Seine. The change of residence was accomplished in the winter. As soon as the inheritance was secured, Cachelin claimed his retirement, which was granted, and he left the bureau. He employed his leisure moments in cutting, with the aid of a little scroll-saw, the covers of cigar-boxes. He made clocks, caskets, *jardinières* and all sorts of odd little ornaments. He had a

passion for this work, the taste for which had come to him on seeing a peripatetic merchant working thus with plaques of wood on the Avenue de l'Opéra; and each day he constrained everybody to admire some new design both complicated and puerile. He was amazed at the success of his own work, and exclaimed frequently: "It is astonishing what one can accomplish!"

The under-chief, Monsieur Rabot, being dead at last, Lesable fulfilled the duties of his place, although he did not receive the title, for sufficient time had not elapsed since his last promotion.

Cora had become a wholly different woman, more refined, more elegant, seeming instinctively to divine all the transformations that wealth imposes. On New Year's day she made a visit to the wife of her husband's chief, a commonplace person, who remained a provincial, notwithstanding a residence of thirty-five years in Paris, and she put so much grace and seductiveness into her prayer that Madame Torchebeuf should stand godmother to her child that the good woman consented. Grandpapa Cachelin was the godfather.

The ceremony took place on a brilliant Sunday in June. All the employees of the bureau were invited to witness it, except the handsome Maze, who was seen no more in the Cachelin circle.

At nine o'clock Lesable waited at the railway station for the train from Paris, while a groom, in livery covered with great gilt buttons, held by the

bridle a plump pony hitched to a new phaëton.

The engine whistled, then appeared, dragging its train of cars, which soon discharged their freight of passengers. Monsieur Torchebeuf descended from a first-class carriage with his wife, in a magnificent toilette, while Pitolet and Boissel got out of a second-class carriage. They had not dared to invite Father Savon, but it was understood that they were to meet him by chance in the afternoon and bring him to dinner with the consent of the chief.

Lesable hurried to meet his superior, who advanced slowly, the lapel of his frock-coat ornamented with a decoration that resembled a full-blown red rose. His enormous head, surmounted by a great hat that seemed to crush his small body, gave him the appearance of a phenomenon, and his wife, if she had stood on tiptoe, could have looked over his head without any trouble.

Leopold, radiant, bowed and thanked his guests. He seated them in the phaëton, then running toward his two colleagues, who were walking modestly behind, he pressed their hands, regretting that his phaëton was too small to accommodate them also. "Follow the quay," he directed, "and you will reach my door—'Villa Désirée,' the fourth one after the turn. Make haste!"

And mounting the phaëton, he took the reins and drove off, while the groom leaped lightly to the little seat behind.

The ceremony took place with great *éclat,* and

then they returned for luncheon. Each one found under his napkin a present proportioned to his station. The godmother received a bracelet of solid gold, her husband a scarf-pin of rubies, Boissel a portfolio of Russian leather, and Pitolet a superb meerschaum pipe. "It was Désirée," they said, "who offered these presents to her new friends."

Madame Torchebeuf, blushing with confusion and pleasure, placed on her fat arm the brilliant circle, and, as the chief wore a narrow black cravat, which would not receive the pin, he stuck the jewel in the lapel of his frock-coat, under the Legion of Honor, as if it had been a decoration of an inferior order.

Outside the window the shining band of the river was seen, curving toward Suresnes, its banks shaded with trees. The sun fell in a rain on the water, making it seem a river of fire. The beginning of the repast was rather solemn, being rendered serious by the presence of Monsieur and Madame Torchebeuf. After a while, however, things began to go more gayly. Cachelin threw out some heavy jokes, which he felt would be permitted him since he was rich, and everyone laughed at them. If Pitolet or Boissel had uttered them, the guests would certainly have been shocked.

At dessert, the infant was brought in and received a kiss from each of the company. Smothered in a cloud of snowy lace, the baby looked at the guests with its blue eyes void of intelligence or expression, and rolled its bald head from side to side with an air of newly awakened interest.

Pitolet, amid the confusion of voices, whispered in the ear of Boissel: "It looks like a little Mazette."

The *mot* went round the ministry next day.

At two o'clock the health of the newly christened baby was drunk, and Cachelin proposed to show his guests over the property, and then take them for a walk by the Seine.

They moved in a slow procession from room to room; then they examined the garden; after which, separating into two parties, they set out for the promenade.

Cachelin, who did not feel at home in the company of ladies, drew Boissel and Pitolet into a *café* on the bank of the river, while Mesdames Torchebeuf and Lesable, with their husbands, walked in the opposite direction, these refined ladies not being able to mingle with the common Sunday herd.

They walked slowly along the path, followed by the two men, who talked gravely of the affairs of the bureau. On the river the boats were continually passing, propelled by long strokes of the oars in the hands of jolly fellows, the muscles of whose bare arms rolled under the sunburned skin. Women, reclining on black or white fur rugs, managed the tillers, drowsing under the hot sun, holding open over their heads, like enormous flowers floating on the surface of the water, umbrellas of red, yellow, and blue silk. Cries from one boat to the other, calls, and shouts, and a remote murmur of human voices farther down, confused and continuous, in-

dicated where the swarming crowds were enjoying their *fête* day.

The long file of fishing smacks drawn in line along the banks remained immovable, while the swimmers, almost naked, standing on the heavy prows, plunged in headforemost, climbed back upon the boats and leaped into the water again.

Madame Torchebeuf, surprised, looked on.

Cora said to her: "It is like this every Sunday; it spoils this charming country for me."

A canoe moved slowly by. Two women rowed, while two men were stretched in the bottom of the boat. One of the women turning her head toward the shore, cried:

"Hello! hello! honest women! I have a man for sale, very cheap! Do you want him?"

Cora turned away contemptuously and taking the arm of her companion said: "We cannot remain here; let us go. What infamous creatures!"

They moved away as Monsieur Torchebeuf was saying to Lesable: "It is to take effect the first of January. The director has positively promised me."

"I know not how to thank you, dear master," Lesable replied.

When they reached home they found Cachelin, Pitolet, and Boissel laughing immoderately and almost carrying Father Savon, whom they jokingly declared they had found on the beach in the company of a *cocotte*. The frightened old man was crying: "It is not true, no, it is not true. It is not

right to say that, Monsieur Cachelin, it is not kind."

And Cachelin, choking with laughter, cried: "Ah, you old rogue, did you not call her your 'sweet turtledove'? I vow you did, you precious knave."

Then the ladies, too, began to laugh at the dismay of the poor old man.

Cachelin continued: "With Monsieur Torchebeuf's permission, we will keep him prisoner for his pains, and make him dine with us."

The chief good-humoredly consented, and they continued to laugh about the lady abandoned by the old man, who protested all the time, annoyed at this mischievous farce. The subject was the occasion of inexhaustible wit throughout the evening, which sometimes even bordered on grossness.

Cora and Madame Torchebeuf, seated under a tent on the lawn, watched the reflections of the setting sun, which threw upon the leaves a purple glow. Not a breath stirred the branches, a serene and infinite peace fell from the calm and flaming heavens.

Some boats still passed, more slowly, drifting with the tide.

Cora remarked: "It appears that poor Monsieur Savon married a bad woman."

Madame Torchebeuf, who was familiar with all the scandals of the bureau, replied:

"Yes, she was an orphan, very much too young for him, and deceived him with a worthless fellow, and she ended by running away with him."

Then the fat lady added: "I say he was a worthless fellow, but I know nothing about it. It is reported that they loved each other very much. In any case, Father Savon is not very seductive."

Madame Lesable replied gravely:

"That is no excuse; the poor man is much to be pitied. Our next door neighbor, Monsieur Barbou, has had the same experience. His wife fell in love with a sort of painter who passed his summers here, and she has gone abroad with him. I do not understand how women can fall so low. To my mind it seems a special chastisement should be meted out to those wicked creatures who bring shame upon their families."

At the end of the alley the nurse appeared, carrying the little Désirée wrapped in her laces. The child was brought toward the two women, all rosy in the red gold of the evening light. She stared at the fiery sky with the same pale and astonished eyes with which she regarded their faces.

All the men who were talking at a distance drew near. Cachelin, seizing his little granddaughter, tossed her aloft in his arms as if he would transport her to the firmament. Her figure was defined against the brilliant horizon, while her long white robe almost touched the ground; and the grandfather cried: "Isn't this the best thing in the world, after all, Father Savon?"

But the old man made no reply.

A domestic opened the door, and announced: "Madame is served!"

TWO LITTLE SOLDIERS

EVERY Sunday, as soon as they were dismissed, the two little soldiers made off. Once outside the barracks, they struck out through Courbevoie, with rapid strides, as if they were on a march.

When they were beyond the houses, they walked more slowly along the dusty road that runs toward Bézons.

They were small and thin, and their coats were too large for them. The sleeves hung down over their hands, and they found their enormous red breeches, which compelled them to waddle, very much of an incumbrance. Under their high helmets their faces had little character—two sallow Breton faces, showing an almost animal simplicity, with gentle blue eyes.

They never conversed during these walks, but went straight on, each with the same thought. That thought was this, that just inside the little wood near Les Champioux they had found a place that reminded them of their own country, where they could feel happy once more.

When they arrived at the trees where the roads from Colombes and Chatou cross, they would take off their helmets and wipe their foreheads. They always stopped on the Bézons bridge and remained there two or three minutes, leaning on the parapet.

Sometimes they gazed out over the basin of Argenteuil, where boats might be seen, with their white, careening sails, recalling perhaps the look of the Breton waters, the harbor of Vanne, near which they lived, and the fishing-boats standing out to sea.

Beyond the Seine they bought provisions from a sausage merchant, a baker, and a wine-seller. These were a piece of blood-pudding, four sous' worth of bread, and a liter of *petit bleu,* which they carried in their handkerchiefs. After leaving Bézons they traveled slowly and talked.

Before them a barren plain studded with clumps of trees led to the little wood that had seemed to them to resemble one at Kermarivan. Grainfields and meadows bordered the path, which was lost in the young greenness of the crops, and Jean Kerderen would always say to Luc le Ganidec:

"It looks as it does near Plounivon."

"Yes, exactly."

Side-by-side they strolled on, filled with vague memories of their own country, with awakened images like the pictures on the colored broadsheets that we buy for a penny. They continued to recognize now a corner of a field, a hedge, a bit of moor-

land, now a crossroad, now a granite cross. Then, too, they always stopped beside a certain great stone, because it looked somewhat like the cromlech at Locneuven.

Every Sunday, on arriving at the first clump of trees, Luc le Ganidec would cut a hazel switch, and begin gently to peel off the bark, thinking of the folk at home. Jean Kerderen carried the provisions.

From time to time Luc would mention a name, or briefly recall some deed of their childhood which aroused long thoughts. And their dear, distant country recaptured them little by little, seizing on their imaginations, and presenting to them her shapes, her sounds, her well-known prospects, with odors of the green lands where the salt sea-air was blowing.

Far now from the exhalations of the Parisian stables, they scented the flowering broom, which the salt breeze of the open sea plucks and bears away. And from the river banks the sails of the boats seemed like the white wings of the coasting-vessels seen beyond the great plain that extended from their homes to the margin of the sea.

They walked with short steps, haunted by a sweet melancholy, by the lingering, ever-present sorrow of a caged animal that remembers his lost liberty.

By the time that Luc had stripped the slender wand of its bark they reached the corner of the wood where they always took breakfast. They found the two bricks which they kept in the thicket,

and kindled a fire of twigs, over which to roast the blood-pudding on the point of a bayonet.

When they had eaten the bread to the last crumb, and drunk the wine to the last drop, they remained silent, seated side-by-side upon the grass, their eyes on the distance, their eyelids drooping, their fingers crossed as at mass, their red legs stretched out beside the poppies of the field. And their leather helmets and brass buttons glittered in the ardent sun, making the larks, that hovered above their heads cease in mid-song.

Toward noon they began to turn their eyes occasionally toward the village of Bézons, for the girl with the cow was coming. She passed them every Sunday on her way to milk and change the pasture of her cow, the only cow in this district that ever went out of the stable to grass. It was pastured in a narrow field along the edge of the wood a little farther on.

They soon perceived the girl, the only human being in sight, and rejoiced in the brilliant reflections thrown off by the tin milk-pail under the rays of the sun. They never talked about her. They only knew they were glad to see her.

She was a big strong girl with red hair, burned by the heat of sunny days.

Once she said:

"Good morning. You two are always here, aren't you?"

Luc le Ganidec answered:

"Yes, we come to rest."

That was all. But the next Sunday she laughed on seeing them, laughed with a feminine keenness which knew well enough that they were bashful. And she asked:

"What are you doing there? Are you trying to see the grass grow?"

Luc was emboldened by this, and smiled as he said: "Maybe we are."

"That's pretty slow work," said she.

He answered, still laughing: "Well, yes, it is."

She went on. But coming back with a pail full of milk, she stopped again before them, and said:

"Would you like a little? It may taste like home."

With the instinctive feeling that they were of the same peasant race as she, being herself also far away from home, she had divined the spot.

Both were touched. Then with some difficulty, she managed to make a little milk run into the neck of a glass bottle in which they carried their wine. And Luc drank first, with little swallows, stopping every minute to see whether he had drunk more than his half. Then he handed the bottle to Jean.

She stood upright before them, her hands on her hips, her pail on the ground, glad at the pleasure she had given.

Then she departed, crying: "*Allons,* adieu! Till next Sunday!"

And as long as they could see her at all, they fol-

lowed with their eyes her tall silhouette, which grew smaller and smaller, till it sank into the verdure of the fields.

When they were leaving the barracks the next week, Jean said to Luc:

"Oughtn't we to buy her something good?"

They were greatly embarrassed by the problem of the choice of a delicacy for the girl with the cow. Luc thought a little tripe would be the best, but Jean preferred some *berlingots* because he was fond of sweets. His choice fairly made him enthusiastic, and they bought two sous' worth of white and red candies.

Being nervous with expectation, they ate their breakfast rapidly.

Jean saw her first. "There she is!" he cried, and Luc repeated: "Yes, there she is."

While still at a distance she laughed at seeing them. Then she cried:

"Is everything going as you like it?"

And in unison they asked:

"Are you getting on all right?"

Then she talked to them of simple things in which they felt an interest—the weather, the crops, and her master.

For a time they were afraid to offer her the candies, which were slowly melting in Jean's pocket.

At last Luc grew bold, and murmured:

"We have brought you something."

She demanded: "What is it? Tell me!"

Then Jean, blushing up to his ears, managed to get at the little paper cornucopia, and held it out.

She at once began to eat the little bonbons, rolling them from one cheek to the other where they made little round lumps. The two soldiers, seated before her, gazed at her with emotion and delight.

Then she went to milk her cow, and on returning once more gave them some milk.

They thought of her all the week; several times they even spoke of her. The next Sunday she sat down with them for a little longer talk; and all three, seated side-by-side, their eyes lost in the distance, clasping their knees with their hands, described the minute details of life in the villages where they were born, while over there the cow, seeing that the milkmaid had stopped on her way, stretched out toward her its heavy head with its dripping nostrils, and gave a long low.

Soon the girl consented to eat a bit of bread with them and drink a little wine. She often brought them plums in her pocket, for the season of plums had come. Her presence sharpened the wits of the two little Breton soldiers, and they chattered like birds.

But one Tuesday Luc le Ganidec asked for leave (a thing that never had happened before) and he did not return until ten o'clock at night. Jean racked his brains to account for this event.

The next Thursday Luc, having borrowed ten sous from his bedfellow, again obtained permission

to leave the barracks for several hours. When he set out with Jean on their Sunday walk his manner was very queer, restless, and quite changed. Kerderen did not understand, but he vaguely suspected something without divining what it could be.

They did not exchange a word until they reached their usual halting-place, where, from their frequent sitting in the same spot the grass was worn away. They ate their breakfast slowly, neither feeling hungry.

Before long the girl appeared. As on every Sunday, they watched her coming. When she was near, Luc rose and made two steps forward. She put her milk-pail on the ground and kissed him passionately, throwing her arms about his neck, without noticing Jean, without remembering that he was there, without even seeing him.

And poor Jean was so desperate that he did not understand, his soul overwhelmed, his heart bursting. Then the girl seated herself beside Luc, and they began to chatter.

Jean did not look at them. He now knew why his comrade had gone out twice in the week, and he felt a burning grief within him, a kind of wound, that sense of rending which is caused by treason.

Luc and the girl went together to change the position of the cow. Jean followed them with his eyes as he saw them departing side-by-side. The red breeches of his comrade made a bright spot on the road. It was Luc who with the mallet ham-

mered down the stake to which they tied the beast.

The girl stooped to milk her, while he stroked the cow's sharp spine with a careless hand. Then they left the milk-pail on the grass, and went deep into the wood.

Jean saw nothing but the wall of leaves where they had entered; and he was so troubled that if he had tried to rise he certainly would have fallen. He sat motionless, stupefied by astonishment and suffering, with an agony simple but deep. He wanted to cry, to run away, to hide himself, never to see anyone any more.

Soon he saw them issuing from the thicket. They returned slowly, holding each other's hands as in the villages do those who are promised, and Luc carried the pail.

They kissed each other again and the girl went off after throwing Jean a friendly "Good evening" and a smile full of meaning. This day she had no thought of offering him any milk.

The two little soldiers sat side-by-side, motionless as usual, silent and calm, their placid faces betraying nothing of all that troubled their hearts. The sun fell on them. Sometimes the cow lowed, looking at them from afar.

At their usual hour they rose to return. Luc cut a switch. Jean carried the empty bottle to return it to the wine-seller. Then they sallied out upon the bridge, and, as they did every Sunday, stopped in the middle to look at the water flowing.

Jean leaned more and more over the iron railing, as if he saw in the current something that attracted him. Luc said: "Are you trying to drink?" Just as he uttered the last word Jean's head overbalanced his body, his legs described a circle in the air, and the little blue and red soldier fell in a heap, struck the water, and disappeared.

Luc, his tongue paralyzed with anguish, tried in vain to shout. Farther down he saw something stir; then the head of his comrade rose to the surface but sank immediately. Farther still he perceived a single hand, which issued from the stream and then disappeared. That was all.

The bargemen who dragged the river did not find the body that day.

Luc set out on a run for the barracks, where he told of the accident, with tears in his eyes, and a husky voice, blowing his nose again and again: "He leaned over—he—he leaned over—so far—so far that his head turned a somersault; and—and—so he fell—he fell—"

Choked with emotion, he could say no more. If only he had known!

A STATE AFFAIR

NEWS of the disaster of Sedan had just reached Paris. The Republic was proclaimed, and France was mad from that day until the time of the Commonwealth. Everybody, from one end of the country to the other, was playing soldier.

Capmakers became colonels and generals; revolvers and daggers were strapped on large rotund bodies, in red sashes; citizens turned warriors, commanding battalions of noisy volunteers and swearing like troopers.

The mere fact of bearing arms systematically excited a people who theretofore had handled only scales and measures, and without reason made them formidable to the first comer. They even executed a few innocent persons to show that they knew how to kill; and, in roaming through virgin fields that still belonged to the Prussians, they shot stray dogs, cows chewing the cud in peace, or sick horses at pasture. Each believed he was about to play a great rôle in military affairs. The *cafés* of the smallest villages, filled with tradesmen in uniform, resembled barracks or field hospitals.

The town of Canneville did not yet know the exciting news of the army and the Capital. But it had been agitated for a month over an encounter between rival political parties. The Mayor, Viscount de Varnetot, a small, old, thin man, remained true to the Empire, especially since he saw rising against him a powerful adversary, in the great, sanguine form of Doctor Massarel, head of the Republican party in the district, venerable chief of the Masonic lodge, president of the Society of Agriculture and of the Fire Department and organizer of the rural militia.

In two weeks he had induced sixty-three men to volunteer in defense of the country—married men, fathers of families, prudent farmers, and merchants of the town. These he drilled daily before the Mayor's window.

Whenever the Mayor appeared, Commander Massarel, bristling with pistols, promenading proudly in front of his troops, would make them shout, "Long live our country!" And this, they noticed, disturbed the little Viscount, who interpreted it as menace and defiance, with perhaps an odious recollection of the great Revolution.

On the morning of Sept. 5, in uniform, with his revolver on the table, the doctor gave consultation to an old peasant couple. The husband had suffered seven years with a varicose vein, but had waited until his wife also had one, so that they might visit a physician together, guided by the post-

man when he should come with the daily newspaper.

Dr. Massarel opened the door, grew pale, straightened himself abruptly and, raising his arms in a gesture of exaltation, cried out loudly in the face of the amazed rustics:

"Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic!"

Then he dropped into his armchair, weak with emotion.

When the peasant explained that his illness began with a feeling as if ants were running up and down his legs, the doctor exclaimed: "Hold your peace! I have wasted too much time with you stupid people. The Republic is proclaimed! The Emperor is a prisoner! France is saved! Long live the Republic!" And, running to the door, he called: "Céleste! Quick! Céleste!"

When the frightened maid hastened in, he stuttered, so rapidly did he try to speak: "My boots, my saber—my cartridge box—and—the Spanish dagger, which is on my night-table. Hurry now!"

The obstinate peasant, taking advantage of the moment's silence, began again: "This seemed like cysts that hurt me when I walked."

The exasperated physician shouted: "Hold your peace! For Heaven's sake! If you had washed your feet oftener, it would not have happened." Then, seizing him by the neck, he hissed in his face: "Can you not understand that we are living in a Republic, stupid?"

But professional sentiment suddenly calmed him, and he showed the old couple out, repeating:

"Return to-morrow, return to-morrow, my friends; I have no time to-day."

While equipping himself from head to foot, he gave the maid a series of urgent orders:

"Run to Lieutenant Picard's and to Sub-lieutenant Pommel's and say I want them here at once. Send Torcheboeuf to me, with his drum. Quick, now! Quick!" And then he collected his thoughts and prepared to master the situation.

The three men in their working clothes arrived together. The Commander, who had expected to see them in uniform, was surprised.

"You know nothing, then? The Emperor has been captured. A Republic is proclaimed. My position is delicate, even perilous."

He reflected some minutes and then continued:

"We must act, and not hesitate. Minutes now are worth hours at other times. Everything depends upon promptness. Picard, go and find the curate and tell him to ring the bell to bring the people together, while I take the lead of them. Torchebœuf, beat the call to assemble the militia in arms, in the square, from as far as the hamlets of Gerisaie and Salmare. Pommel, put on your uniform immediately, that is, the jacket and cap. We are going to take possession of the *mairie* and summon Monsieur de Varnetot to transfer his office to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Act, then, promptly. I will go with you to your house, Pommel, as we are to work together."

Five minutes later, the Commander and his subaltern, armed to the teeth, appeared in the square, just when the little Viscount de Varnetot, wearing hunting gaiters and having his rifle on his shoulder, arrived by another street, walking rapidly and followed by three guards in green jackets, each armed with a knife and a gun.

While the doctor stopped, half stupefied, these four men entered the Mayor's house and the door was closed behind them.

"We are anticipated," murmured the doctor; "and now must wait for re-enforcements; nothing can be done for a quarter of an hour."

Here Lieutenant Picard appeared, saying: "The curate refuses to obey; he has shut himself up in the church with the beadle and the porter."

On the other side of the square, opposite the mairie, the church, silent and black, showed its great oaken door with wrought-iron trimmings.

Then, as the puzzled inhabitants put their noses out of the windows, or appeared on the steps of their houses, the rolling of a drum was heard, and Torchebœuf was seen, furiously beating the three quick strokes of the call to arms. He crossed the square with military step, and then disappeared on a road leading to the country.

The Commander drew his sword, advanced alone

to the middle of the space between the two buildings where the enemy was barricaded and, waving his weapon over his head, roared at the top of his lungs: "Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!" Then he fell back where his officers were. The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary put up their shutters and closed their shops. The grocery remained open.

Meanwhile the militiamen were arriving, a few at a time, variously clothed, but all wearing caps, the cap constituting the whole uniform of the corps. They were armed with their old, rusty guns, which had hung over chimneypieces in kitchens for thirty years, and looked like a detachment of country soldiers.

When about thirty had arrived, the Commander explained briefly the state of affairs. Then, turning to his Major, he said: "Now we must act."

While the collected inhabitants discussed the matter, the doctor formed his plan of campaign:

"Lieutenant Picard, advance to the windows of the Mayor's house and, in the name of the Republic, order Monsieur de Varnetot to turn over the town hall to me."

But the Lieutenant, who was a master-mason, refused.

"You are a rogue," he said. "Trying to make a target of me! Those fellows in there are good shots, you know that. Execute your commissions yourself!"

The Commander turned red. "In the name of discipline I order you to go," said he.

"I am not spoiling my features without knowing why," answered the Lieutenant.

Men of influence, in a group near by, were heard laughing, and one of them called out: "You are right, Picard, it is not the proper time." The doctor muttered: "Cowards!" And, handing his sword and his revolver to a soldier, he advanced with measured step, his eye fixed on the windows, as if he expected to see a gun pointed at him.

When he was within a few steps of the building, the doors at the extremities, affording an entrance to two schools, opened, and a crowd of little boys on one side, girls on the other, came out and began playing in the open space, chattering around the doctor like a flock of birds.

When the last were out, the door closed. Most of the children finally scattered, and then the Commander called out:

"Monsieur de Varnetot?" A window in the first story opened, and Monsieur de Varnetot appeared.

The Commander began: "Monsieur, you are aware of the great events that have changed our system of Government. The party you represent no longer exists. The side I represent has now come into power. Under these sad, but decisive circumstances, I demand of you, in the name of the Republic, to transfer to my hands the authority that was vested in you by the outgoing power."

Monsieur de Varnetot replied: "Doctor Massarel, I am Mayor of Canneville, so placed by the proper authorities, and Mayor of Canneville I shall remain until the title is revoked and replaced by an order from my superiors. As Mayor, I am at home in the *mairie*, and here I shall stay. Now, just try to put me out." And he closed the window.

The Commander returned to his troops. Measuring Lieutenant Picard from head to foot, he said:

"You are a numbskull, you are a goose, the disgrace of the army. I shall degrade you."

The Lieutenant replied: "I'll attend to that myself." And he joined a group of muttering civilians.

Then the doctor hesitated, until an idea struck him. He ran to the telegraph office, on the other side of the square, and sent three dispatches: "To the Members of the Republican Government, at Paris," "To the New Republican Prefect of the Lower Seine, at Rouen," "To the New Republican Sub-Prefect of Dieppe."

He exposed the situation fully; told of the danger should the commonwealth remain in the hands of the monarchistic Mayor, offered his devout services, asked for orders and signed his name, following it with all his titles. Then he returned to his army corps and, taking ten francs out of his pocket, said:

"Now, my friends, go and eat and drink a little something. Only leave here a detachment of ten men, to see that no one leaves the Mayor's house."

Ex-Lieutenant Picard, chatting with the watch-

maker, overheard this, and remarked with a sneer: "Pardon me, but if they go out, there will be an opportunity for you to go in. Otherwise, I can't see how you are to get in there!"

The doctor, making no reply, went away to luncheon. In the afternoon he disposed of offices all about town, having the air of knowing of an impending surprise.

The butcher, the baker, and the apothecary reopened their shops, and stood gossiping on the steps. If the Emperor was a prisoner, there must be a traitor somewhere. They did not feel sure of the revenue of a new Republic.

Toward nine o'clock, the doctor returned quietly and alone to the Mayor's residence, persuaded that his adversary had retired. And, as he was trying to force an entrance with a few blows of an axe, the loud voice of a guard demanded: "Who goes there?" Monsieur Massarel at once retreated with all speed.

Another day dawned and there was no change in the situation. The militia occupied the square, while the inhabitants stood awaiting the solution. People from neighboring villages came to look on. Finally the doctor, realizing that his reputation was at stake, resolved to settle the matter in one way or another. He had just decided that he must do something energetic, when the door of the telegraph office opened and the little servant of the directress appeared, holding two papers.

She went directly to the Commander and gave him one of the dispatches; then, crossing the square, with lowered head and mincing steps, she rapped gently at the door of the barricaded house, as if ignorant that a part of the army was concealed there.

The door opened slightly; a man's hand received the message, and the girl returned, blushing and ready to weep, from being stared at.

The doctor demanded, with stirring voice: "A little silence, if you please." And, after the populace became quiet, he continued proudly:

"Here is a communication that I have received from the Government." And raising the dispatch, he read:

"Old Mayor deposed. Advise us of what is most necessary. Instructions later.

"For the Sub-Prefect,

"SAPIN, *Counselor.*"

He had triumphed. His heart was beating with joy. His hand trembled, when Picard, his old subaltern, called to him from a neighboring group: "That's all right; but if the others in there won't go out, your paper hasn't a leg to stand on." The doctor grew a little pale. If they would not go out —in fact, he must go ahead now. This was not only his right, but his duty. And he looked anxiously at the mayoralty, hoping that he might see the door open. But the door remained closed. The

crowd was increasing, surrounding the militia, and some laughed.

One thought tortured the doctor. If he should make an assault, he must march at the head of his men; and since, with him dead, all contest would cease, it would be at him alone that Monsieur de Varnetot and the three guards would aim. And their aim was very good! Picard had reminded him of that.

But a new idea dawned upon him, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Go, quickly, and ask the apothecary to send me a napkin and a pole."

The Lieutenant hurried off. The doctor was about to make a political banner, a white one, that would, perhaps, rejoice the heart of that old legitimist, the Mayor.

Pommel returned with the required linen and a broom-handle. With some pieces of string, they improvised a standard, which Massarel seized in both hands and again advanced toward the mayoralty. When in front of the door, he called out: "Monsieur de Varnetot!"

The door opened suddenly, and Monsieur de Varnetot and the three guards appeared. The doctor recoiled, instinctively. Then he saluted his enemy courteously, and announced, almost choked by emotion: "I have come, sir, to communicate to you the instructions I have just received."

That gentleman, without any salutation whatever, replied: "I am going to withdraw, sir, but you

must understand that it is not because of fear, or in obedience to an odious government that has usurped the power." And, biting off each word, he declared: "I do not wish to appear to serve the Republic even for a day. That is all."

Massarel, amazed, made no reply; and Monsieur de Varnetot, walking off rapidly, disappeared around the corner, followed closely by his escort. Then the doctor returned to the crowd. When he was near enough to be heard, he cried: "Hurrah! Hurrah! The Republic triumphs all along the line!"

But no enthusiasm was manifested. The doctor tried again: "The people are free! You are free and independent! Do you understand? Be proud of it!"

The listless villagers looked at him with dull eyes. In his turn, he looked at them, indignant at their indifference, seeking for words that might make a grand impression, electrify this placid country and justify his mission. The inspiration came, and turning to Pommel, he said: "Lieutenant, go and get the bust of the ex-Emperor, which is in the Council Hall, and bring it to me with a chair."

The man soon reappeared, carrying on his right shoulder Napoleon III in plaster, and holding in his left hand a straw-bottomed chair.

Massarel took the chair, placed it on the ground, put the white image upon it, fell back a few steps and called out in a sonorous voice:

"Tyrant! Here do you fall! Fall in the dust

and in the mire. An expiring country groans under your feet. Destiny has called you the Avenger. Defeat and shame cling to you. You fall conquered, a prisoner to the Prussians, and upon the ruins of the crumbling Empire rises the young and radiant Republic, picking up your broken sword."

He waited for applause. But the bewildered peasants remained silent. And the bust, with its pointed moustaches extending beyond the cheeks on each side, the bust, so motionless and well groomed as to be fit for a hairdresser's sign, appeared to be looking at Monsieur Massarel with a plaster smile, ineffaceable and mocking.

They remained thus face-to-face, Napoleon on the chair, the doctor about three steps away. Suddenly the Commander grew angry. What was to be done? What was there that would move this people, and bring about a definite victory in opinion? His hand happened to rest on his hip and to come in contact with the butt end of his revolver, under his red sash. No inspiration, no further word would come. But he drew his pistol, advanced two steps, and, taking careful aim, fired at the late monarch. The ball entered the forehead, leaving a little black hole, like a spot, nothing more. There was no effect. Then he fired a second shot, which made a second hole, then a third; and then, without stopping, he emptied his revolver. The brow of Napoleon disappeared in white powder, but the eyes,

the nose, and the fine points of the moustaches remained intact. Exasperated, the doctor overturned the chair with a blow of his fist and, resting a foot on the remainder of the bust in a position of triumph, he shouted: "So let all tyrants perish!"

Still no enthusiasm was manifest, and as the spectators seemed to be in a stupor from astonishment, the Commander called to the militiamen: "You may now go to your homes." And he went toward his own house with great strides, as if he were pursued.

His maid, when he appeared, told him that some patients had been waiting in his office for three hours. He hastened in. There were the two varicose-vein patients who had returned at daybreak, obstinate but patient.

The old man immediately began his explanation: "This began by a feeling like ants running up and down the legs."

OLD AMABLE

I

A HUMID, gray sky seemed to settle down on the vast brown plain. The odor of autumn —that sad odor of bare, moist lands, fallen leaves, and dead grass—made the stagnant evening air more thick and heavy. The peasants scattered through the fields, were still at work waiting for the Angelus to call them back to the farm-houses, whose thatched roofs were visible through the branches of the leafless trees that protected the apple-orchards against the wind.

At the side of the road, on a heap of clothes, a very small boy was seated with his legs apart, playing with a potato, which he occasionally let fall on his dress, whilst five women were bending down, planting slips of colza in the adjoining plain. With a slow, continuous movement, all along the furrows made by the plough, they made holes with sharp wooden stakes and therein placed the plant, a little withered, which sank on one side; then they patted down the earth and continued their work.

A man wearing wooden shoes, passing, with a

whip in his hand, stopped near the child, took it up and kissed it. Then one of the women rose and came across to him. She was a tall, large, red-haired Norman woman, with large hips, waist and shoulders.

She said in a resolute voice:

"Why, here you are, Césaire—well?"

The man, a thin young fellow with a melancholy air, answered:

"Well, nothing at all—always the same thing."

"He won't have it?"

"He won't have it."

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you think I ought to do?"

"Go and see the curé."

"I will."

"Go at once!

"I will."

They stared at each other, he holding the child in his arms. He kissed it once more and then put it down again.

In the distance, between two farm-houses, could be seen a plough drawn by a horse and guided by a man. They moved on very gently in the twilight.

The woman continued:

"What did your father say?"

"He said he would not have it."

"Why wouldn't he have it?"

The young man pointed to the child, and then with a glance drew her attention to the man follow-

ing the plough, and said gruffly and emphatically:

"Because 'tis his, this child of yours."

The girl shrugged her shoulders and in an angry tone said:

"Faith, every one knows well that it is Victor's. And what about it, after all? I made a slip. Am I the only woman that did? My mother made a slip before me, and then yours did also before she married your father! Who is it in the country that hasn't made a slip? I made a slip with Victor because he took advantage of me while I was asleep in the barn, it's true, and afterward it happened between us when I was not asleep. I certainly would have married him if he were not a servant man. Am I a worse woman for that?"

The man said simply:

"As for me, I like you just as you are, with or without the child. It's only my father that opposes me. But I'll see about settling the business."

She answered:

"Go to the curé at once."

"I am going to him."

And he set forth with his heavy peasant's tread, while the girl turned round to plant colza.

In fact, the man who thus went off, Césaire Houlbrèque, the son of deaf old Amable Houlbrèque, desired to marry, in spite of his father, Céleste Lévesque, who had a child by Victor Lecoq, a laborer on her parents' farm, who had been turned out of doors for this act.

The hierarchy of caste does not exist in the country, and if the laborer is thrifty, he takes a farm in his turn, and becomes the equal of his former master.

So Césaire Houlbrèque went off, his whip under his arm, brooding over his own thoughts and lifting one after the other his heavy wooden shoes daubed with clay. He wanted Céleste Lévesque with her child because she was the wife he wanted. He could not say why, but he knew it, he was sure of it. He had only to look at her to be convinced of it, to feel queer, quite stirred up, simply stupid with happiness. He even delighted in kissing the little boy, Victor's little boy, because he belonged to her.

And he gazed, without hatred, at the outline of the man who was following his plough along the horizon.

But old Amable did not want this marriage. He opposed it with the violent obstinacy of a deaf man.

Césaire in vain shouted in his ear, in that ear which still heard a few sounds:

"I'll take good care of you, daddy. I tell you she's a good girl, and strong, and also thrifty."

The old man repeated:

"As long as I live, I won't see her your wife."

And nothing could get the better of him, nothing could make him waver. Only one hope was left to Césaire. Old Amable was afraid of the curé through the apprehension of death, which he felt was drawing nigh. He had not much fear of God,

nor of the devil, nor of hell, nor of purgatory, of which he had no conception, but he dreaded the priest, who represented to him burial, as one might fear the doctors through horror of diseases. For eight days Céleste, who knew this weakness of the old man, had been urging Césaire to find the curé, but Césaire always hesitated, because he had not much liking for the black robe, which to him represented hands always stretched out for collections or for blessed bread.

However, he had made up his mind, and he proceeded toward the presbytery, thinking how he would present his case.

The Abbé Raffin, a lively little priest, thin and never shaved, was awaiting his dinner-hour while warming his feet at his kitchen fire.

When he saw the peasant entering he asked, merely turning his head:

"Well, Césaire, what do you want?"

"I'd like to have a talk with you, Monsieur le curé."

The man remained standing, intimidated, holding his cap in one hand and his whip in the other.

"Well, talk."

Césaire looked at the housekeeper, an old woman who dragged her feet while putting on the cover for her master's dinner at the corner of the table in front of the window.

He stammered:

" 'Tis—'tis a sort of confession."

Thereupon the Abbé Raffin carefully surveyed his peasant. He saw his confused countenance, his air of constraint, his wandering eyes, and he said to the housekeeper:

"Marie, go away for five minutes to your room, while I talk to Césaire."

The servant cast an angry glance on the man and went away grumbling.

The clergyman resumed:

"Come, now, tell your story."

The young fellow still hesitated, looked down at his wooden shoes, moved about his cap, then, all of a sudden, he made up his mind:

"Here it is: I wish to marry Céleste Lévesque."

"Well, my boy, what's to prevent you?"

"The father won't have it."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my father."

"What does your father say?"

"He says she has a child."

"She's not the first to whom that has happened, since our Mother Eve."

"A child by Victor Lecoq, Anthime Loisel's servant man."

"Ha! ha! So he won't have it?"

"He won't have it."

"What! not at all?"

"No, no more than an ass that won't budge an inch, saving your presence."

"What do you say to him yourself in order to make him yield?"

"I say to him that she's a good girl, and strong too, and thrifty also."

"And this does not make him agree to it. So you wish me to speak to him?"

"Exactly. You speak to him."

"And what am I to tell your father?"

"Why, what you tell people in your sermons to make them give you sous."

In the peasant's mind every effort of religion consisted in loosening the purse-strings, in emptying the pockets of men to fill the heavenly coffer. It was a kind of huge commercial establishment, of which the curés were the clerks, sly, crafty clerks, sharp as any one must be who transacts business for the good God at the expense of the country people.

He knew full well that the priests rendered services, great services to the poorest, to the sick and dying, that they assisted, consoled, counseled, sustained, but all this by means of money, in exchange for white pieces, for beautiful glittering coins, which paid for sacraments and masses, advice and protection, pardon of sins and indulgences, purgatory and paradise, according to the yearly income and the generosity of the sinner.

The Abbé Raffin, who knew his man and who never lost his temper, burst out laughing.

"Well, yes, I'll tell your father my little story; but you, my lad, you'll come to church."

Houlbrèque extended his hand to give a solemn assurance:

"On the word of a poor man, if you do this for me, I promise that I will."

"Come, that's all right. When do you wish me to go and find your father?"

"The sooner the better—to-night, if you can."

"In half an hour, then, after supper."

"In half an hour."

"That's understood."

"Good-by till we meet again, Monsieur le curé; many thanks."

"Not at all, my lad."

And Césaire Houlbrèque returned home, his heart relieved of a great weight.

He held a little farm on lease, for his father and he were not rich. Alone with a female servant, a little girl of fifteen, who made the soup, looked after the fowls, milked the cows and churned the butter, they lived frugally, though Césaire was a good cultivator. They had not enough of land and cattle to earn more than the necessaries of life.

The old man no longer worked. Sad, like all deaf persons, crippled with pains, bent double, and twisted, he went through the fields leaning on his stick, watching the animals and the men with a hard, distrustful eye. Sometimes he sat by the side of the road without moving for hours, vaguely pondering over the things that had engrossed his whole life, the price of eggs and corn, the sun and the

rain that spoil the crops or make them grow. And, worn out with rheumatism, his old limbs still took in the humidity of the soil, as for sixty years they had drunk in the moisture of the walls of his low house thatched with damp straw.

He returned at the close of the day, took his place at the end of the table in the kitchen and when the earthen bowl containing the soup was before him he placed round it his crooked fingers, which seemed to have kept the round form of the bowl and, winter and summer, he warmed his hands, before beginning to eat, so as to lose nothing, not even a particle of the heat that came from the fire, which costs a great deal, neither one drop of soup, into which fat and salt have to be put, nor one morsel of bread, which comes from the wheat.

Then by a ladder he climbed up into a loft, where he had his straw-bed, while his son slept below stairs at the end of a niche near the chimneypiece, and the servant shut herself up in a kind of cellar, a black hole that was formerly used to store the potatoes.

Césaire and his father seldom talked to each other. From time to time, when there was a question of selling a crop or buying a calf, the young man would ask his father's advice, and, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, bawl out his views into his ear, and old Amable either approved of them or opposed them in a slow, hollow voice that came from the depths of his stomach.

So one evening Césaire, approaching him as if about to discuss the purchase of a horse or a heifer, communicated to him at the top of his voice his intention to marry Céleste Lévesque.

Then the father was angry. Why? On the score of morality? No, certainly. The virtue of a girl is of slight importance in the country. But his avarice, his deep, fierce instinct for saving, revolted at the idea that his son should bring up a child that he had not begotten himself. He had thought, in one second, of the soup the little fellow would swallow before becoming useful on the farm. He had calculated all the pounds of bread, all the pints of cider, that this child would consume up to his fourteenth year, and a mad anger broke out against Césaire, who had not bestowed a thought on all this.

He replied in an unusually strong voice:

"Have you lost your senses?"

Thereupon Césaire began to enumerate his reasons, to speak about Céleste's good qualities, to prove that she would be worth a thousand times what the child would cost. But the old man doubted these advantages, while he could have no doubts as to the child's existence; and he replied with emphatic repetition:

"I will not have it! I will not have it! As long as I live, this won't be done!"

And at this point they had remained for three months, resuming at least once a week the same fruitless discussion.

On arriving home, the peasant found his father seated at table, for he came late because of his visit to the presbytery.

They dined in silence, face-to-face, ate a little bread and butter after the soup, and drank a glass of cider. Then they remained motionless in their chairs, with scarcely a glimmer of light, the little servant girl having carried off the candle in order to wash the spoons, wipe the glasses and cut the crusts of bread to be ready for next morning's breakfast.

There was a knock at the door, which was immediately opened, and the priest appeared. The old man raised toward him an anxious eye full of suspicion, and, foreseeing danger, he was getting ready to climb up his ladder when the Abbé Raffin laid his hand on his shoulder and shouted close to his temple:

"I wish to have a talk with you, Father Amable."

Césaire had disappeared. He would not listen, for he was afraid and did not wish to see his hopes crumble slowly with each obstinate refusal of his father. He preferred to learn the truth at once, good or bad, later; and he went out into the night. It was a moonless, starless night, one of those misty nights when the air is thick with humidity. A vague odor of apples floated through the farmyard, for it was the season when the earliest apples are gathered, the "early ripe," as they are called in the cider country. As Césaire passed the cattle-

sheds the warm smell of living beasts asleep on manure was exhaled through the narrow windows, and he heard the stamping of the horses, which were at the end of the stable, and the sound of their jaws tearing and munching the hay on the racks.

He went straight ahead, thinking about Céleste. In his simple nature, whose ideas were hardly more than images directly generated by objects, thoughts of love only formulated themselves by calling up before the mind the picture of a big red-haired girl standing in a hollow road and laughing, with her hands on her hips.

It was thus he saw her the day when he first conceived a fancy for her. He had known her from infancy, but never had been so struck by her as on that morning. They had stopped to talk for a few minutes, and then he went away, and as he walked along he kept repeating:

"Faith, she's a fine girl. 'Tis a pity she made a slip with Victor."

When he saw her again he felt something tickling the end of his throat, as if a cock's feather had been driven through his mouth into his chest, and since then, every time he found himself near her, he was astonished at this nervous tickling which always began again.

In three months, so much did she please him, he determined to marry her. He could not have said whence came her charm, but he explained it thus:

"I am possessed by her," as if the desire for this girl were as dominating as one of the powers of hell. He hardly troubled himself about her transgression. It was a pity, but, after all, it did her no harm, and he bore no grudge against Victor Lecoq.

But if the curé should not succeed, what was he to do? He did not dare to think of it.

He reached the presbytery and sat near the little gate to wait for the priest's return.

In about half an hour he heard steps on the road, and though the night was very dark, he soon distinguished the still darker shadow of the cassock.

He rose, his legs trembling, and did not venture to speak.

The clergyman perceived him and said gayly:

"Well, my lad, it's all right."

Césaire stammered:

"All right—it isn't possible."

"Yes, my lad, but not without trouble. What an old simpleton your father is!"

The peasant repeated:

"It isn't possible!"

"Why, yes. Come and look me up to-morrow at midday to settle about the publication of the banns."

The young man seized the curé's hand, pressed it, shook it, bruised it, as he stammered:

"True—true—true, Monsieur le curé, on the word of an honest man, you'll see me to-morrow—at your sermon."

II

The simple wedding took place in the middle of December. Césaire, attired in new clothes, was ready by eight o'clock in the morning to go and fetch his betrothed to the Mayor's office, but it was too early. He seated himself before the kitchen table and waited for the members of the family and the friends that were to accompany him.

For eight days it had been snowing, and the brown earth, the earth already fertilized by the autumn sowing, had become a dead white.

It was cold in the thatched houses adorned with white caps, and the trees appeared to be flowering, covered with white as they had been in the pleasant month of their blossoming.

This day the great snow clouds had disappeared, and the blue sky showed itself above the white earth on which the rising sun cast silvery reflections.

Césaire looked straight before him through the window, very happy, thinking of nothing.

The door opened, and two peasant women in their Sunday clothes entered, the aunt and the cousin of the bridegroom; then three men, his cousins; then a woman who was a neighbor. They seated themselves and remained motionless and silent, the women on one side of the kitchen, the men on the other, suddenly seized with timidity, with that embarrassed sadness which takes possession of people assembled for a ceremony. One of the cousins soon asked:

"Is it not the hour?"

Césaire replied:

"I am afraid it is."

"Come on! Let us set out," said another, and they rose. Then Césaire, possessed by a feeling of uneasiness, climbed up the ladder to see whether his father was ready. The old man, as a rule an early riser, had not made his appearance. His son found him on his bed of straw, wrapped up in his blanket, with his eyes open and a malicious gleam in them.

He bawled into his ear: "Come, daddy, get up. It's time for the wedding."

The deaf man murmured in a doleful tone:

"I can't get up. I have a chill that freezes my back. I can't stir."

The young man, dumbfounded, stared at him, guessing that this was only a pretence.

"Come, daddy; you must make an effort."

"I can't do it."

"Look here! I'll help you."

And he stooped toward the old man, pulled off his blanket, caught him by the arm and lifted him. But old Amable began to whine:

"Ooh! ooh! ooh! What suffering! Ooh! I can't. My back is stiffened up. The cold wind must have rushed in through this cursed roof."

"Well, you'll get no dinner, as I'm having a spread at Polyte's inn. This will teach you what comes of acting mulishly."

And he hurried down the ladder and set out, accompanied by his relatives and guests.

The men had turned up the bottoms of their trousers so as not to get them wet in the snow. The women held up their petticoats and showed their lean ankles with gray woollen stockings and their bony shanks resembling broomsticks. And they all went forward at a swinging gait, one behind the other, without uttering a word, moving cautiously, for fear of losing the road, which was hidden beneath the stretch of snow.

As they approached the farmhouses they saw one or two persons waiting to join them, and the procession continued without stopping and wound its way forward, following the outlines of the road, so that it resembled a living chaplet of black beads undulating through the white countryside.

Before the bride's door a large group was stamping up and down the open space, awaiting the bridegroom. When he appeared they gave him a loud greeting, and presently Céleste came forth from her room, clad in a blue dress, her shoulders covered with a small red shawl and her head adorned with orange flowers.

But every one asked Césaire:

"Where's your father?"

He replied with embarrassment:

"He couldn't move, on account of his pains."

And the farmers tossed their heads with an incredulous air.

They went toward the Mayor's office. Behind the pair about to be wedded a peasant woman carried Victor's child, as if it were going to be baptized; and the men, in pairs now, with arms linked, walked through the snow with the movements of a sloop at sea.

After being united by the Mayor in the little municipal house, the pair were made one by the curé, in his turn, in the modest house of God. He blessed their union, promising them fruitfulness, then he preached to them on the matrimonial virtues, the simple and healthful virtues of the country, work, concord and fidelity, while the child, who was cold, began to fret behind the bride.

As soon as the couple reappeared on the threshold of the church, shots were discharged from the ditch of the cemetery. Only the barrels of the guns could be seen, whence came forth rapid jets of smoke; then a head appeared gazing at the procession. It was Victor Lecoq celebrating the marriage of his old sweetheart, wishing her happiness and sending her his good wishes with explosions of powder. He had employed friends of his, five or six laboring men, for these salvos of musketry. And it was considered a polite attention.

The repast was given in Polyte Cacheprune's inn. Twenty covers were laid in the great hall where people dined on market days, and the big leg of mutton turning before the spit, the fowls browned under their own gravy, the chitterlings sputtering

over the bright, clear fire, filled the house with a thick odor of live coal sprinkled with fat—the heavy odor of rustic fare.

They sat down at midday and the soup was poured into the plates at once. All faces had brightened up; mouths opened to utter loud jokes, and eyes were laughing with knowing winks. They were intending to amuse themselves, and no mistake. The door opened, and old Amable appeared. He seemed in a bad humor and his face wore a scowl as he dragged himself forward on his canes, whining at every step to indicate his suffering. As soon as they saw him they stopped talking, but suddenly his neighbor, Daddy Malivoire, a big joker, who knew all the little tricks and ways of people, began to yell, as Césaire used to do, by making a trumpet of his hands:

"Hello, my gay old boy, you have a good nose to be able to smell Polyte's cookery from your own house!"

A roar of laughter burst from the throats of those present, and Malivoire, excited by his success, continued:

"There's nothing for rheumatics like a chitterling poultice! Along with a glass of three-six! It keeps your belly warm."

The men uttered shouts, banged the table with their fists, laughed, bending on one side and raising their bodies again as if they were working a pump. The women clucked like hens, while the servants

wriggled, standing against the walls. Old Amable was the only one that did not laugh, and, without making any reply, he waited till they made room for him

They found a place for him in the middle of the table, facing his daughter-in-law, and as soon as he was seated he began to eat. With each spoonful of soup that went into his stomach, with each mouthful of bread or meat crushed between his gums, with each glass of cider or wine that flowed through his gullet, he thought he was regaining something of his own property, getting back a little of his money which all those gluttons were devouring, in fact, saving a portion of his own means. And he ate in silence with the obstinacy of a miser who hides his coppers, with the same gloomy persistence with which he formerly performed his daily labors.

But suddenly he noticed at the end of the table Céleste's child on a woman's lap, and his eye remained fixed on the little boy. He continued eating, with his glance riveted on the youngster, into whose mouth the woman every now and then put a little morsel, which he nibbled at. And the old man suffered more from the few mouthfuls taken by this little chap than from all that the others swallowed.

The meal lasted till evening, and then every one went home.

"Come, daddy, we must go home," said Césaire.

And he put the old man's two canes into his hands.

Céleste took her child in her arms, and they went on slowly through the pale snowy night. The deaf old man, three-fourths tipsy, and even more malicious under the influence of drink, refused to go forward. Several times he even sat down with the object of making his daughter-in-law take cold, and he kept giving vent to a continuous groaning, as if he were in pain.

When they reached home he at once climbed up to his loft, while Césaire made a bed for the child near the deep niche where he was going to lie down with his wife. They heard the old man for a long time moving about on his bed of straw, and he even talked aloud several times.

When he came down his ladder next morning he saw his daughter-in-law looking after the housekeeping.

She cried out to him:

"Come, daddy, hurry on! Here's some good soup."

And she placed at the end of the table the round black earthen bowl filled with steaming liquid. He sat down without giving any answer, seized the hot bowl, warmed his hands with it in his customary fashion, and, as the day was very cold, even pressed it against his breast, trying to make a little of the living heat of the boiling liquid enter into his old body stiffened by so many winters.

Then he took his canes and went out into the fields, covered with snow, till dinner time, for he

had seen Céleste's child still asleep in a big soap-box.

He did not take his place in the household. He lived in the thatched house, as in bygone days, but he seemed not to belong there now, to be no longer interested in anything, to look upon his son, the wife and child as strangers to whom he never spoke.

The long and severe winter glided by.

Then the early spring made the seeds sprout forth, and the peasants once more, like laborious ants, passed their days in the fields, toiling from morning till night, under the wind and under the rain, along the furrows of brown earth that produced the bread of men.

The year promised well for the newly married pair. The crops grew thick and strong. There were no late frosts, and the apple-trees bursting into bloom scattered on the grass their rosy-white snow, which promised a hail of fruit for autumn.

Césaire toiled hard, rose early and left off work late, to save the expense of a hired man.

His wife said to him sometimes:

"You'll make yourself ill, in the long run."

He replied:

"Certainly not. I'm a good judge."

Nevertheless, one evening he came home so fatigued that he had to get to bed without supper. He rose next morning at the usual hour, but could not eat, in spite of his fast on the previous night, and he had to come back to the house in the middle

of the afternoon in order to go to bed again. In the night he began to cough; he turned round on his straw couch, feverish, with his forehead burning, his tongue dry and his throat parched by thirst.

However, at daybreak he went toward his grounds, but next morning the doctor was sent for, who pronounced him very ill with inflammation of the lungs.

And he no longer left the dark recess in which he slept. He could be heard coughing, gasping and tossing about in this hole. To see him, to give his medicine and to apply cupping-glasses, they had to bring a candle to the entrance. Then one could see his narrow head with his long, matted beard underneath a thick lacework of spiders' webs, which hung and floated when stirred by the air. And the hands of the sick man were as if dead under the dingy sheets.

Céleste watched him with restless activity, made him take physic, applied blisters to him, and went back and forth in the house, while old Amable remained at the edge of his loft, watching at a distance the gloomy cavern where his son lay dying. He did not come near him from hatred of the wife.

Six more days passed, then one morning, when Céleste, who slept on the ground on two loose bundles of straw, went to see whether her husband was better, she no longer heard his rapid breathing. Terror-stricken, she asked:

"Well, Césaire, what sort of night have you had?"

He did not answer. She put out her hand to touch him, and the flesh on his face felt cold as ice. Then she uttered a great cry, the long cry of a woman overpowered with fright. He was dead.

At this cry the deaf old man appeared at the top of his ladder, and when he saw Céleste rushing to call for help, he quickly descended, placed his hand on his son's face, and suddenly realizing what had happened, went to shut the door from the inside, to prevent the wife from re-entering and resuming possession of the house, since his son was no longer living.

Then he sat down on a chair by the dead man's side.

Some of the neighbors arrived, called out and knocked. He did not hear them. One of them broke the glass of the window and jumped into the room. Others followed. The door was opened again, and Céleste reappeared, all in tears, with swollen face and bloodshot eyes. Then old Amable, vanquished, climbed back to his loft without a word.

The funeral took place next morning, and after the ceremony the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law found themselves alone in the farmhouse with the child.

It was the usual dinner hour. She lighted the fire, made some soup and placed the plates on the table, while the old man sat on the chair waiting, without appearing to look at her. When the meal was ready she bawled in his ear:

"Come, daddy, you must eat."

He rose, took his seat at the end of the table, emptied his soup bowl, masticated his bread and butter, drank his two glasses of cider and then took himself off.

It was one of those warm, enjoyable days when life ferments, pulsates, blooms all over the surface of the soil.

Old Amable followed a little path across the fields. He looked at the young wheat and oats, thinking that his son was now under the earth, his poor boy! He walked along wearily, dragging his legs after him in a limping fashion. And, as he was all alone in the plain, all alone under the blue sky, in the midst of the growing crops, all alone with the larks that he saw hovering above his head, without hearing their light song, he began to weep.

Then he sat down beside a pond and remained there till evening, gazing at the little birds that came to drink. When the night was falling, he returned to the house, supped without saying a word and climbed up to his loft. And his life went on as in the past. Nothing was changed, except that his son Césaire slept in the cemetery.

What could he, an old man, do? He could work no longer; he was now good for nothing but to swallow the soup prepared by his daughter-in-law. And he ate it in silence, morning and evening, watching with an eye of rage the little boy also taking soup at the other side of the table. Then he

would go out, prowl about the fields like a vagabond, hiding behind the barns where he would sleep for an hour or two as if he were afraid of being seen, and then return home at the approach of night.

But Céleste's mind began to be occupied by graver anxieties. The farm needed a man. Somebody should be there always to go through the fields, not a mere hired laborer, but a regular farmer, a master who understood the business and would take an interest in the farm. A lone woman could not manage the farming, watch the price of corn and direct the sale and purchase of cattle. Then ideas came into her head, simple, practical ideas, which she had turned over at night. She could not marry again before the end of the year, and it was necessary to take care of pressing interests at once.

Only one man could help her out of her difficulties, Victor Lecoq, the father of her child. He was strong and understood farming; with a little money he would make an excellent cultivator. She was aware of his skill, having known him while he was working on her parents' farm.

So one morning, seeing him passing along the road with a cart of manure, she went out to meet him. When he perceived her, he drew up his horses and she said to him as if she had met him the night before:

"Good-morrow, Victor. Are you quite well, the same as ever?"

He replied:

"I'm quite well, the same as ever. And how are you?"

"Oh, I'd be all right, but that I'm alone in the house, which bothers me on account of the farm."

Then they remained chatting a long time, leaning against the wheel of the heavy cart. The man frequently lifted his cap to scratch his forehead and began thinking, while she, with flushed cheeks, went on talking warmly, telling him of her views, and her projects for the future. At last he said in a low tone:

"Yes, it can be done."

She opened her hand like a countryman clinching a bargain and asked:

"Is it agreed?"

He pressed her outstretched hand.

"It is agreed."

"It's settled, then, for next Sunday?"

"It's settled for next Sunday."

"Well, good-morning, Victor."

"Good-morning, Madame Houlbrèque."

III

This particular Sunday was the day of the annual village festival, in honor of the patron saint, which in Normandy is called the assembly.

For eight days quaint-looking vehicles in which live the families of strolling fair exhibitors, lottery

managers, keepers of shooting-galleries and other forms of amusement or exhibitors of curiosities, whom the peasants call "wonder-makers," came along the roads, drawn slowly by gray or sorrel horses.

The dirty wagons with their floating curtains, accompanied by a melancholy-looking dog trotting between the wheels, drew up one after another on the green in front of the town hall. Then a tent was erected in front of each ambulant abode, and inside this tent could be seen, through the holes in the canvas, glittering things, which excited the envy or the curiosity of the village youngsters.

When the morning of the fête arrived all the booths were opened, displaying their splendors of glass or porcelain, and the peasants on their way to mass looked with genuine satisfaction at these modest shops, though they saw them every year.

Early in the afternoon there was a crowd on the green. From neighboring villages the farmers arrived with their wives and children in the two-wheeled open *chars-à-bancs,* which rattled along, swaying like cradles. They unharnessed at their friends' houses and the farmyards were filled with strange-looking traps, gray, high, lean, crooked, like long-clawed creatures from the depths of the sea. And each family, with the youngsters in front and the grown-up ones behind, came to the assembly with tranquil steps, smiling countenances, and open hands—big hands, red and bony, accustomed to

work and apparently tired of their temporary rest.

A clown was blowing a trumpet. The barrel-organ accompanying the carrousel sent forth its shrill, jerky notes. The lottery-wheel made a whirring sound like that of tearing cloth, and every moment the crack of the rifle could be heard. And the slow-moving throng passed on quietly in front of the booths, resembling paste in a fluid condition, with the motions of a flock of sheep and the awkwardness of heavy animals that had escaped by chance.

The girls, holding one another's arms in groups of six or eight, were singing; the youths followed them, making jokes, with their caps over their ears and their blouses stiffened with starch, swollen out like blue balloons. The whole countryside was there.

Old Amable himself, wearing his old-fashioned green frock coat, had wished to see the assembly, for he never failed to attend on such an occasion. He looked at the lotteries, stopped in front of the shooting-galleries to criticise the shots, and interested himself specially in a very simple game which consisted in throwing a big wooden ball into the open mouth of a mannikin carved and painted on a board.

Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Daddy Malivoire, who said:

"Ha, daddy! Come and have a glass of brandy."

They sat down at the table of an open-air restau-

rant. They drank one glass of brandy, then two, then three, and old Amable once more began wandering through the assembly. His thoughts became slightly confused, he smiled without knowing why, he smiled in front of the lotteries, in front of the wooden horses, and especially in front of the killing game. He remained there a long time, filled with delight, when he saw a holiday-maker knocking down the wooden gendarme or the curé, two authorities whom he instinctively distrusted. Then he returned to the inn and drank a glass of cider to cool himself. Night came on, and a neighbor came to warn him:

"You'll get home late for the stew, daddy."

When he set out for the farmhouse, the warm soft shadow of a spring night was slowly descending on the earth.

When he reached the front door he thought he saw through the window two persons in the house. He stopped, surprised, then went in, and saw Victor Lecoq seated at the table, with a plate filled with potatoes before him, taking his supper in the place where his son had sat.

And he turned round suddenly as if intending to go away. The night was very dark now. Céleste started up and shouted at him:

"Come quick, daddy! Here's some good stew to finish off the assembly with."

He complied through inertia and sat down, watching in turn the man, the woman and the child. Then he ate quietly, as on ordinary days.

Victor Lecoq seemed quite at home, talked from time to time to Céleste, took up the child in his lap and kissed him. And Céleste again served him with food, poured out drink for him and appeared happy while speaking to him. Old Amable's eyes followed them attentively, though he could not hear what they were saying.

When he had finished supper (and he had eaten but little, there was such a weight at his heart), he rose, and instead of ascending to his loft he opened the gate of the yard and went out into the open air.

When he had gone, Céleste, a little uneasy, asked:

"What is he going to do?"

Victor replied in an indifferent tone:

"Don't bother yourself. He'll come back when he's tired."

Then she looked after the house, washed the plates and wiped the table, while the man quietly took off his clothes. Then he slipped into the dark and hollow bed in which she had slept with Césaire.

The yard gate opened, and old Amable again appeared. As soon as he entered the house he looked round on every side with the air of an old dog on the scent. He was in search of Victor Lecoq. As he did not see him, he took the candle off the table and approached the dark niche in which his son had died. In the interior of it he perceived the man lying under the bedclothes asleep. Then the deaf man noiselessly turned round, put back the candle and went out into the yard.

Céleste had finished her work. She put her son into his bed, arranged everything and waited for her father-in-law's return before lying down herself. She sat on a chair, without moving her hands, and with her eyes fixed on vacancy. As he did not come back, she murmured in a tone of impatience:

"This good-for-nothing old man will make us burn four sous' worth of candles."

Victor answered from under the bedclothes:

"It's more than an hour since he went out. We ought to see whether he fell asleep on the bench outside the door."

"I'll go and see," she said.

She took the candle and went out, shading the light with her hand in order to see.

She saw nothing in front of the door, nothing on the bench, nothing on the dung-heap, where the old man used sometimes to sit in hot weather.

But as she was on the point of going in again, she chanced to raise her eyes toward the big apple-tree, which sheltered the entrance to the farmyard, and suddenly she saw two feet—two feet at the height of her face, belonging to a man who was hanging.

She uttered terrible cries: "Victor! Victor! Victor!"

He ran out in his shirt. She could not utter another word, and turning aside her head so as not to see, she pointed toward the tree with her outstretched arm.

Not understanding what she meant, he took the candle to find out, and in the midst of the foliage lighted up from below he saw old Amable hanging with a stable-halter round his neck.

A ladder was leaning against the trunk of the apple-tree.

Victor ran to fetch a bill-hook, climbed the tree and cut the halter. But the old man was already cold, and his tongue protruded with a frightful grimace.

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

THE Prussian Commandant, Major Graf von Farlsberg, was reading his newspaper, lounging in a great armchair, with his booted feet on the beautiful marble hearth, where his spurs had made two holes, which grew deeper every day, for the three months that he passed in the château of Urville.

A cup of coffee was smoking on a small, inlaid table, which was stained with liquors, burnt by cigars, and notched by the penknife of the victorious officer, who occasionally would stop while sharpening a pencil, to jot down figures, or to make a drawing on it, as it took his fancy.

When he had read his letters and the German newspapers, which his baggage-master had brought him, he got up, and after throwing three or four large pieces of green wood upon the fire—for these gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park trees to keep themselves warm—he went to the window. The rain was descending in torrents, a Normandy rain, which looked as if it were poured

out by some furious hand, a slanting rain, which was as thick as a curtain, formed a kind of wall with oblique stripes, and deluged everything, a rain such as one frequently experiences in the neighborhood of Rouen, which is the watering-pot of France.

For a long time the officer looked at the sodden turf, and at the Andelle beyond it, which was overflowing its banks, and he was drumming a waltz on the window-panes, with his fingers, when a noise made him turn. It was Captain Baron von Kelweinstein, his second in command.

The Major was a giant, with broad shoulders, and a long, fair beard, which hung against his chest like a cloth. His whole solemn person suggested the idea of a military peacock with his tail spread. He had cold, gentle, blue eyes, and a scar from a sword-cut received in the war wtih Austria. He was said to be honorable as well as brave.

The Captain, a short, red-faced man, tightly girded at the waist, had his red hair cropped quite close, and in certain lights almost looked as if he had been rubbed over with phosphorus. He had lost two front teeth one night, but he could not remember how, and because of this defect his words could not always be understood. There was a bald patch on the top of his head, like a monk's, with a fringe of curly golden hair.

The Commandant shook hands with him, and drank his cup of coffee (the sixth that morning) at a draught, while he listened to the report of what

had occurred; and then they went to the window, and declared the outlook very unpleasant. The Major, a quiet man, with a wife at home, could accommodate himself to anything; but the Captain, who was rather fast, frequenting low resorts, and much given to women, was angry at being shut up for three months in the compulsory chastity of that wretched place.

There was a knock at the door, and when the Commandant said: "Come in," an automatic soldier appeared, and by his presence announced breakfast. In the dining-room, they met three officers of lower rank: a lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two sub-lieutenants, Fritz Scheunebarg, and Count von Eyrick, a very short, fair-haired man, who was proud and brutal toward men, harsh toward prisoners, and very violent generally.

Since this officer had been in France, his comrades had called him "Mademoiselle Fifi." They had given him that nickname on account of his dandified style and small waist, which looked as if he wore stays, from his pale face, on which was a budding moustache, and from his habit of using the French expression, *fi, fi, donc,* which he pronounced with a slight whistle when he wished to express his contempt for persons or things.

The dining-room was a magnificent long room, whose fine old mirrors, now cracked by pistol bullets, and Flemish tapestry, now cut to ribbons and in places hanging in rags, from sword-cuts, told too

well of Mademoiselle Fifi's occupation in his spare time.

Three family portraits hung on the walls; a steel-clad knight, a cardinal, and a judge, all smoking long porcelain pipes, which had been inserted into holes in the canvas, while a lady in a long, pointed waist proudly exhibited an enormous moustache, drawn with charcoal.

The officers ate their breakfast almost in silence in that mutilated room, the old oaken floor of which had become as solid as the stone floor of a public-house.

When they had finished eating, and were smoking and drinking, they began to discuss the dull life they were leading. The bottles of liquor passed from hand to hand, and all sat back, taking repeated sips from their glasses, and hardly removing from their mouths the long, bent stems that terminated in china bowls painted in a manner to delight a Hottentot.

They repeatedly re-filled their glasses with a gesture of resigned weariness. Mademoiselle Fifi emptied his every minute, and a soldier immediately gave him another. They were enveloped in a cloud of strong tobacco-smoke; and they seemed to be sunk in a state of drowsy, stupid intoxication, in that dull state of drunkenness of men who have nothing to do, when suddenly the Baron sat up and said: "By heavens! This cannot go on; we must think of something to do." And on hearing this,

Lieutenant Otto and Sub-lieutenant Fritz, who wore the grave, heavy German countenance, said: "What, Captain?"

He thought for a few moments, and then replied: "What? Well, we must get up some entertainment, if the Commandant will allow us."

"What sort of entertainment, Captain?" the Major asked.

"I will arrange all that, Commandant," the Baron said. "I will send *Le Devoir* to Rouen, who will bring us some ladies. I know where they can be found. We will have supper here, as all the materials are here, and we shall have a jolly evening at least."

Graf von Farlsberg smiled and shrugged his shoulders: "You must be mad, my friend."

But all the other officers rose, surrounded their chief, and said: "Let the Captain have his own way, Commandant; for it is terribly dull here."

"Very well," the Major replied, and the Baron sent at once for *Le Devoir.*

The latter was an old corporal who never had been known to smile, but who carried out to the letter the orders of his superiors, no matter what they might be. He stood there, and he received the Baron's instructions with an impassive face and then went out. Five minutes later a large wagon belonging to the military train, covered with a miller's tilt, galloped off as fast as four horses could take it. The officers awoke from their lethargy, their faces brightened, and they began to talk.

Though it was raining as hard as ever, the Major declared that it was not so dull, and Lieutenant von Grossling said the sky was clearing up, while Mademoiselle Fifi seemed unable to keep in his place. He got up, and sat down again, and his bright eyes appeared to be looking for something to destroy. Suddenly, looking at the lady with the moustache, the young fellow pulled out his revolver, and said: "You shall not see it." And, without leaving his seat, with two successive bullets, he cut out both the eyes of the portrait.

"Let us make a mine!" he then exclaimed, and the conversation was suddenly interrupted, as if they had found some fresh and powerful subject of interest. The mine was his invention, his method of destruction, and his favorite amusement.

The owner, Count Fernand d'Amoys d'Urville, when he left the château, had not had time to carry away or to hide anything, except the plate, which had been stowed in a hole made in the wall, so that, as he was very rich and had good taste, the large drawing-room, which opened into the dining-room, had looked like the gallery in a museum.

Costly oil-paintings, water-colors, and drawings hung upon the walls, while on the tables, on the hanging shelves, and in elegant glass cupboards, were a thousand knicknacks: small vases, statuettes, groups in Dresden china, grotesque Chinese figures, old ivory, and Venetian glass.

Little was left now; not that the things had been

stolen, for the Major would not have allowed that, but Mademoiselle Fifi *would have a mine*, and on that occasion all the officers thoroughly enjoyed themselves for five minutes. The little Marquis went into the drawing-room to get what he wanted, and brought back a small, delicate china teapot, which he filled with gunpowder, and carefully introduced a piece of German tinder through the spout. Then he lighted it, and carried it into the next room; but he returned immediately, and closed the door. The Germans all stood expectantly, their faces full of childish curiosity, and as soon as the explosion had shaken the château, they rushed in.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who got in first, clapped his hands in delight at the sight of a terra-cotta Venus, whose head had been blown off, and each picked up pieces of porcelain, and wondered at the strange shape of the fragments, while the Major was looking at the large drawing-room which had been wrecked in such a Neronic fashion, and was now strewn with shattered works of art. He went out first, and said, smiling: "He managed that very well!"

But there was such a cloud of smoke in the dining-room, mingled with the tobacco smoke, that they could hardly breathe, so the Commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had gone into the room for a glass of cognac, went to it.

The moist air blew into the room, and brought a sort of spray with it, which powdered their beards. They looked at the tall trees dripping with the

rain, at the broad valley covered with mist, and at the church spire which rose in the distance like a gray point in the beating rain.

The bells had not been rung since their arrival. That was the only resistance the invaders had met in the neighborhood. The parish priest had not refused to house and feed the Prussian soldiers; several times he had even drunk a bottle of beer or claret with the Commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary; but it was useless to ask him for a single stroke of the bells; he would sooner have been shot. And everyone, for twenty-five miles round, praised Abbé Chantavoine's firmness and heroism, in proclaiming the public mourning by the silence of his church bells.

The whole village grew enthusiastic over his resistance, and was ready to back up their pastor and to risk anything, as they looked upon that silent protest as the safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that thus they had deserved better of their country than Belfort and Strassburg, that they had set an equally valuable example, and that the name of their little village would become immortalized by that; but with that exception, they refused their Prussian conquerors nothing.

The Commandant and his officers laughed at that inoffensive courage, and as the people in the whole country round showed themselves obliging and compliant, they willingly tolerated their silent patriotism. Only little Count Wilhelm would

have liked to force them to ring the bells. He was angry at his superior's politic compliance with the priest's scruples, and every day he begged the Commandant to allow him to sound "ding-dong, ding-dong," just once, by way of a joke. But the Commandant would not yield, and to console *herself,* Mademoiselle Fifi made a mine in the château.

The five men stood there together several minutes, and at last Lieutenant Fritz remarked, with a laugh: "The ladies will certainly not have fine weather for their drive." Then they separated, each to his own duties.

When they met again they laughed at seeing each other as dandified and smart as on the day of a grand review. The Commandant's hair did not look as gray as in the morning, and the Captain had shaved—had kept only his moustache, which looked like a streak of fire under his nose.

At a quarter past six the Baron said he heard a rumbling in the distance. They all rushed down, and soon the wagon drove up at a gallop with its four horses, splashed up to their backs, steaming and panting. Five women alighted, five handsome girls whom a comrade of the captain to whom *Le Devoir* had taken his card, had selected with care.

They had not required much pressing, as they were sure of being well treated, having come to know the Prussians in the three months during which they had had to do with them. "It is part of

our business, so it must be done," they said as they drove along.

They went immediately into the dining-room, which when lighted up looked still more dismal in its dilapidated state; while the table covered with choice dishes, the beautiful china and glass, and the plate, which had been found in the hole in the wall where its owner had hidden it, gave to the place the look of a resort where bandits were supping after a robbery. The Captain was radiant; he took hold of the women as if he were familiar with them, appraising them, kissing them, valuing them for what they were worth as ladies of pleasure; and when the three young men wished to appropriate one each, he opposed them authoritatively, reserving to himself the right to apportion them justly, according to their ranks, so as not to offend the hierarchy. He placed them all in a line according to height, and addressing the tallest, he said in a voice of command: "What is your name?"

"Pamela," she replied, raising her voice.

Then he said: "Number One, called Pamela, is adjudged to the Commandant."

Then, having kissed Blondina, the second, as a sign of his own proprietorship, he proffered stout Amanda to Lieutenant Otto, Eva, "the Tomato," to Sub-lieutenant Fritz, and Rachel, the shortest of them all, a very young, dark girl, with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, to the youngest officer, frail Count Wilhelm von Eyrick.

They were all pretty and plump, with no distinctive features, and all were very much alike in looks and person, from their daily dissipation and the life common to houses of public accommodation.

The three younger men wished to carry off their women immediately, under the pretext of finding them brushes and soap; but the captain said they were quite fit to sit down to dinner, and that those who went up would wish for a change when they came down, and so would disturb the other couples, and his experience in such matters carried the day. There were only kisses, many expectant kisses.

Suddenly Rachel choked, and began to cough until the tears came into her eyes, while smoke came through her nostrils. Under pretense of kissing her, the Count had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage, and did not say a word, but looked at her possessor with latent hatred in her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The Commandant appeared delighted; he seated Pamela on his right, and Blondina on his left, and said, as he unfolded his table-napkin: "That was a delightful idea of yours, Captain."

Lieutenant Otto and Fritz, who were as polite as if they had been with fashionable ladies, rather intimidated their neighbors; but Baron von Kelweinstein gave rein to his vicious propensities, beamed, made doubtful remarks, and seemed on fire with his crown of red hair. He paid them compliments in

French from the other side of the Rhine, and from between his broken teeth sputtered out gallant remarks that were fit only for a low pot-house.

They did not understand him, however, and their intelligence did not appear to be roused until he uttered vile words and broad expressions, which were mangled by his accent. Then all began to laugh at once, like mad women, and fell against one another, repeating the words, which the Baron then began to say all wrong, that he might have the pleasure of hearing them say doubtful things. They gave him as much of that stuff as he wanted, for they were tipsy after the first bottle of wine, and, becoming themselves once more, and giving way to their usual habits, they kissed the moustaches on the right and left of them, pinched their arms, uttered furious cries, drank out of every glass, and sang French couplets and snatches of German songs, which they had picked up in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves, intoxicated by that which was displayed to their sight and touch, grew very amorous, shouted and broke the dishes, while the soldiers behind them waited on them stolidly. The Commandant was the only one that exercised any restraint.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on his knees, and, becoming excited, at one moment kissed the little black curls on her neck, inhaling the pleasant warmth of her body, and all the savor of her per-

son, through the slight space there was between her dress and her skin, and at another pinched her furiously through the material, and made her scream, for he was seized with a fit of ferocity, and tormented by a desire to hurt her. He often held her close to him, as if to make her part of himself, and held his lips in a long kiss on the Jewess's rosy mouth, until she lost her breath; and at last he bit her until a stream of blood ran down her chin and on her bodice.

For the second time, she looked him boldly in the face, and as she bathed the wound, she said: "You will have to pay for that!"

He merely laughed and said: "I will pay."

At dessert champagne was served, and the Commandant rose, and in the same voice in which he would have drunk to the health of the Empress Augusta, he said: "To our ladies!" Then began a series of toasts worthy of the lowest soldiers and drunkards, mingled with filthy jokes, which ignorance of the language made still more brutal. They stood up, one after the other, trying to say something witty, forcing themselves to be funny, and the women, who were so drunk that they almost fell off their chairs, with vacant looks and clammy tongues madly applauded.

The Captain, wishing to give an appearance of gallantry to the orgy, raised his glass again, and said: "To our victories over hearts!" Thereupon Lieutenant Otto, a species of bear from the Black

Forest, jumped up, saturated with drink, and seized by an access of alcoholic patriotism, cried. "To our victories over France!"

Drunk as they were, the women were silent, and Rachel turned round with a shudder, and said: "Look here, I know some Frenchmen before whom you would not dare to say that." Then the little Count, still holding her on his knee, began to laugh, and said: "Ha! ha! ha! I never have met any of them, myself. As soon as we show ourselves, they run away!"

The girl, in a terrible rage, shouted into his face: "You are lying, you dirty scoundrel!"

For a moment, he looked at her steadily, with his bright eyes, as he had looked at the portrait before he destroyed it with revolver bullets, and then he laughed again: "Ah! yes, talk about them, my dear! Should we be here now, if they were brave?" Then becoming excited, he exclaimed: "We are the masters! France belongs to us!" She jumped from his knee with a bound, and threw herself into her chair, while he rose, held out his glass over the table, and repeated: "France and the French, the woods, the fields, and the houses of France belong to us!"

The others, who were thoroughly intoxicated, and were suddenly seized by military enthusiasm, seized their glasses, and shouting, "Long live Prussia!" drained them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, for they were reduced

to silence, and were afraid. Even Rachel had no reply to make, and then the little Count put his champagne glass, which had just been refilled, on the head of the Jewess, and exclaimed: "All the women in France belong to us, also!"

At that she got up so quickly that the glass was upset, spilling the amber-colored wine on her black hair as if to baptize her, and broke into fragments as it fell to the floor. With trembling lips, she defied the looks of the officer, who was still laughing, and she stammered out, in a voice choked with rage: "That—that—that—is not true,—for you certainly shall not have any French women."

He sat down again, so as to laugh at his ease, and trying vainly to speak in the Parisian accent, he said: "That is good, very good! Then what did you come here for, my dear?"

She made no reply for a moment, since in her agitation she did not understand him at first; but as soon as she grasped his meaning, she said indignantly and vehemently: "I! I! I am not a woman; I am only a strumpet, and that is all that Prussians want."

Almost before she had finished, he slapped her full in her face; but when he was raising his hand again, as if he would strike her, she, almost crazy with passion, seized a small dessert knife from the table, and stabbed him in the neck, just above the breastbone. Something that he was about to say was cut short in his throat, and he sat there with

his mouth half open and a terrible look in his eyes.

All the officers shouted in horror, and leaped up tumultuously; but throwing her chair between Lieutenant Otto's legs, who fell down at full length, Rachel ran to the window, opened it and before they could seize her, jumped out into the night and the pouring rain.

In two minutes, Mademoiselle Fifi was dead. Fritz and Otto drew their swords and threatened to kill the women, who threw themselves at their feet and clung to their knees. With some difficulty the Major prevented the slaughter, and had the four terrified girls locked up in a room under the care of two soldiers. Then he organized a pursuit of the fugitive, as carefully as if he were about to engage in a skirmish.

The table was cleared immediately and served as a bed on which to lay out Fifi, and the four officers went to the window, rigid and sobered, with the stern faces of soldiers on duty, and tried to pierce through the darkness of the night, amid the steady torrent of rain. Suddenly, a shot was heard, and then another, a long way off; and for four hours they heard from time to time, near or distant reports and rallying cries, strange words uttered as a call, in guttural voices.

In the morning they all returned. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded, by their comrades in the confusion of the nocturnal pursuit, but they had not caught Rachel.

Then the inhabitants of the district were terrorized, the houses were turned topsy-turvy, the country was scoured and beaten up, over and over again, but the Jewess had not left a single trace of her passage.

When the General was told of this, he gave orders to hush up the affair, so as not to set a bad example to the army, but he severely censured the Commandant, who in turn punished his inferiors. The General had said: "One does not go to war in order to amuse oneself, and to caress prostitutes." And Graf von Farlsberg, in his exasperation, resolved to have his revenge on the district, but as a pretext was necessary for showing severity, he sent for the priest, and ordered him to have the bell tolled at the funeral of Count von Eyrick.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest was humble and most respectful, and when Mademoiselle Fifi's body left the Château d'Urville on its way to the cemetery, escorted by soldiers, who marched with loaded rifles, for the first time the bell sounded its funereal knell in a lively manner, as if a friendly hand were caressing it. At night it sounded again, and the next day, and every day; it rang as much as anyone could desire. Sometimes even, it would begin at night, and sound gently through the darkness. The peasants in the neighborhood declared that it was bewitched, and nobody, except the priest and the sacristan now dared go near the church tower. They went because a poor girl was living there

in grief and solitude, secretly provided for by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed, and then one evening the priest borrowed the baker's cart, and himself drove his prisoner to Rouen. When they arrived there he embraced her, and she quickly went back on foot to the establishment from which she had come, where the proprietress, who thought she was dead, was very glad to see her.

A short time afterward a patriot who had no prejudices, who liked her because of her bold deed, and who afterward loved her for herself, married her and made a lady of her.

THE GHOST

IN speaking of a recent lawsuit, the subject of sequestration was introduced, and each of us had a story to tell, a true story, he said. We, a party of intimate friends, were spending the evening together at an old family mansion in the Rue de Grenelle. The old Marquis de la Tour-Samuel, who was eighty-two, rose, and, leaning on the mantelpiece, said, in a somewhat tremulous voice:

"I also know of something strange that has haunted me all my life. It is fifty-six years since the incident occurred, yet not a month passes without my seeing it again in a dream, so great is the impression it left on me. For ten minutes I experienced such fright that ever since a sort of constant terror has remained with me. Sudden noises startle me violently, and objects dimly seen at night inspire me with a mad desire to flee from them. In short, I am afraid of the dark.

"But I would not have acknowledged this before I reached my present age. Now I can say anything. I never have recoiled before real danger, ladies;

and therefore it is permissible, at eighty-two years of age, not to be brave in the presence of imaginary danger.

"That affair so completely upset me, caused me such deep, mysterious and terrible distress, that I never have spoken of it to any one. I will now tell it exactly as it happened, but with no attempt at explanation.

"In July, 1827, I was stationed at Rouen. One day as I was walking along the quay I met a man whom I thought I recognized, but I was not able to place him. Instinctively I made a movement to stop; the stranger perceived this and held out his hand.

"He was a friend to whom I had been deeply attached in youth. For five years I had not met him, and he appeared to have aged half a century. His hair was white, and he walked bent over, as if completely exhausted. He apparently understood my surprise, and told me of the misfortune that had shattered his life.

"He had fallen madly in love with a young girl, and married her, but, after a year of more than earthly happiness, she died suddenly of heart disease. On the day of her burial he left his country home and came to his town house in Rouen, where he lived, alone and unhappy, so wretched that he thought seriously of suicide.

" 'Since I have found you again in this manner,' he said, 'I will ask of you an important service.

It is to go and get for me out of the desk in my bedroom (our bedroom) some papers of which I have urgent need. I cannot send a servant or a business clerk, because discretion and absolute silence are necessary. As for myself, nothing on earth would induce me to re-enter that house. I will give you the key of the room, which I locked on leaving, and the key of my desk, also a few words for my gardener, telling him to open the château for you. But breakfast with me to-morrow, and we will arrange all that.'

"I readily promised the slight favor he asked. It was, for that matter, merely a ride which I could make in an hour, his property being but a few miles from Rouen.

"At ten o'clock the following day I breakfasted, *tête-à-tête,* with my friend, but he hardly spoke.

"He begged me to pardon him; the thought of the visit I was to make to that room, the scene of his lost happiness, overcame him, he said. Indeed, he seemed singularly agitated and preoccupied, as if undergoing some mysterious mental struggle.

"At last he explained exactly what I had to do. I must take two packages of letters and a roll of papers from the first right-hand drawer of the desk, of which I had the key. He added:

" 'I need not ask you to refrain from looking at them.'

"I was wounded at that remark and said so somewhat sharply. He stammered:

" 'Forgive me, I suffer so,' and tears came to his eyes.

"About one o'clock I took my leave.

"The weather was glorious, and I trotted across the fields, listening to the song of the larks and the rhythmical clang of my sword against my boot. Then I entered the forest and walked my horse. Branches of trees brushed my face as I passed, and occasionally I caught a leaf with my teeth and chewed it, from sheer gladness at being alive and strong on such a radiant day.

"As I approached the château I took from my pocket the letter for the gardener, and was surprised at finding it sealed. I was so irritated that I was about to turn back without fulfilling my promise, but reflected that my friend in his troubled condition might easily have fastened the envelope without noticing that he did so.

"The manor looked as if it had been deserted for twenty years. The open gate was falling from its hinges, the walks were overgrown with grass, and the flower-beds were no longer distinguishable.

"The noise I made by kicking at a shutter brought from a side door an old man, who seemed stunned at seeing me. On receiving my letter, he read it, reread it, turned it over and over, looked me up and down, put the paper into his pocket, and at last said:

" 'Well, what is it you wish?'

"I replied shortly:

" 'You ought to know, as you have just read your master's orders. I am to enter the château.'

"He seemed overcome.

" 'Then you are going in—into her room?'

"I began to lose patience.

" 'Damn it! Do you presume to question me?'

"He answered confusedly:

" 'No—sir—but—but it has not been opened since—since the—death. If you will be kind enough to wait five minutes I will go and—and see if——'

"I interrupted him angrily:

" 'See here, what do you mean by these tricks? You know very well you cannot enter that room, for here is the key!'

"He no longer objected.

" 'Then, sir, I will show you the way.'

" 'Show me the staircase, and leave me. I'll find my way without you.'

" 'But—sir—indeed——'

"Then I lost patience completely, and pushing him aside I entered the house.

"I first went through the kitchen, then through two rooms occupied by this man and his wife. I then crossed a large hall, mounted a staircase, and recognized the door described by my friend.

"I easily opened it, and entered the apartment. It was dark and at first I could distinguish nothing. I stopped short, disagreeably affected by that musty odor of rooms long closed. As my eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness I saw plainly

enough a large and disordered bedroom, the bed without sheets but still retaining its mattresses and pillows, on one of which was a deep impression, as if an elbow or a head had recently rested there.

"The chairs all appeared out of place. I noticed that a door, doubtless of a closet, had remained half open.

"I first went to the window, to let in light; but the fastenings of the shutters were so rusty that I could not move them. I tried to break them with my sword, but without success. As I was growing irritated over my useless effort and could now see fairly well in the semi-darkness, I gave up the hope of getting more light, and went to the writing-desk.

I seated myself in an armchair and, letting down the lid of the desk, I opened the drawer designated. It was full to the top. I needed but three packages, which I knew how to recognize, and began searching for them.

"I was straining my eyes to read the superscriptions when I seemed to hear, or rather feel, something rustle back of me. I paid no attention, believing that a draught from the window was moving some drapery. But in a minute another movement, almost imperceptible, sent a strangely disagreeable little shiver over my skin. It was so stupid to be affected thus, even slightly, that self-respect prevented my turning round. I had just found the second package I needed and was about to lay my hand on the third when a long and painful sigh,

uttered close to my shoulder, made me bound from my seat and land several feet off. As I jumped I had turned round my hand on the hilt of my sword and, truly, had I not felt it at my side I should have taken to my heels.

"A tall woman, dressed in white, stood gazing at me from the back of the chair where I had been sitting an instant before.

"Such a shudder ran through all my limbs that I nearly fell backward. No one who has not experienced it can understand that frightful, unreasoning terror. The mind becomes vague, the heart ceases to beat, the entire body grows as limp as a sponge.

"I do not believe in ghosts, nevertheless I collapsed from a hideous dread of the dead; and in a few moments I suffered more than in all the rest of my life, from terror of the supernatural. If she had not spoken I should have died, perhaps. But she spoke, in a sweet, sad voice that set my nerves vibrating. I dare not say that I became master of myself and recovered my reason. No! I was terrified, and hardly knew what I was doing; but a certain innate pride, a remnant of soldierly instinct, made me, almost in spite of myself, maintain a bold front. She said:

" 'Oh, sir, you can render me a great service.'

"I wished to reply, but it was impossible for me to utter a word. Only a vague sound came from my throat. She continued:

" 'Will you? You can save me, cure me. I suf-

fer frightfully. I suffer, oh! how I suffer!' and she slowly seated herself in the armchair, still looking at me.

" 'Will you?' she said.

"I nodded in assent, my voice still being paralyzed.

"Then she held out a tortoise-shell comb, and murmured:

" 'Comb my hair, oh! comb my hair; that will cure me; it must be combed. Look at my head—how I suffer; and my hair pulls so!"

"Her hair, very long and very black, it seemed to me, hung over the back of the armchair and touched the floor.

"Why did I promise? Why did I take that comb with a shudder, and why did I hold in my hands her long black hair which gave my skin a frightful, cold sensation, as if I were handling snakes? I cannot tell.

"That sensation has remained in my fingers, and I still tremble in recalling it.

"I combed her hair. I handled, I know not how, those icy locks. I twisted, knotted, and unknotted, and braided them. She sighed, bowed her head, seemed happy. Suddenly she said: 'Thank you!' snatched the comb from my hands, and fled by the door that I had noticed ajar.

"Left alone, I experienced for several seconds the agitation of one who awakens from a nightmare. At last I regained my senses; I ran to the

window and with a mighty effort burst open the shutters, letting a flood of light into the room. Then I sprang to the door by which that being had departed. I found it closed and immovable.

"The mad desire to flee overcame me like a panic, the panic that soldiers know in battle. I seized the three packets of letters on the open desk, dashed down the stairs four steps at a time, found myself outside, I know not how, and, seeing my horse a few steps off, leaped into the saddle and galloped away.

"I stopped only when I reached Rouen and alighted at my lodgings. Throwing the reins to my orderly. I fled to my room and shut myself in. For an hour I anxiously asked myself whether I were not the victim of a hallucination. Undoubtedly I had had one of those incomprehensible nervous attacks, those exaltations of mind that give rise to visions and are the stronghold of the supernatural. And I began to believe I had seen a vision, when, as I approached the window, my eyes fell by chance upon my breast. My military cape was covered with long black hairs. One by one, with trembling fingers, I plucked them off and threw them away.

"I then called my orderly. I was too disturbed, too upset to go to my friend that day, and I also wished to reflect more fully upon what I ought to tell him. I sent him his letters, for which he gave the soldier a receipt. He asked after me most par-

ticularly, and, on being told I was ill—had had a sunstroke—appeared exceedingly anxious. Next morning I went to him, determined to tell him the truth. He had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned. I called again during the day; my friend was still absent. After waiting a week longer without news of him, I notified the authorities, and a judicial search was instituted. Not the slightest trace of his whereabouts or manner of disappearance was discovered.

"A minute inspection of the abandoned château revealed nothing suspicious. There was no indication that a woman had been concealed there. After fruitless researches all further efforts were abandoned, and for fifty-six years I have heard nothing; I know no more than before."

USELESS BEAUTY

I

IT was about half-past five one fine afternoon at the end of June, when the sun was shining warm and bright into the large courtyard, that a very elegant victoria with two beautiful black horses drew up before the mansion.

The Comtesse de Mascaret came down the steps just as her husband, who was coming home, appeared in the carriage entrance. He stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and turned rather pale. The Countess was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished-looking, with her long oval face, her complexion like creamy ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair. She entered her carriage without looking at him, without even seeming to have noticed him, with such a particularly highbred air that the furious jealousy that had devoured him for so long again gnawed at his heart. He went up to her and said: "You are going for a drive?"

She merely replied disdainfully: "You see that I am!"

"In the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Probably."

"May I come with you?"

"The carriage belongs to you."

Without being surprised at the tone in which she answered, the Count got in and sat down by his wife's side, saying: "Bois de Boulogne." The footman sprang up beside the coachman, and the horses as usual pranced and tossed their heads until they were in the street. Husband and wife sat side by side without speaking. He was thinking how to begin a conversation, but she maintained such an obstinately hard look that he did not venture to make the attempt. At last, however, he cunningly, accidentally as it were, touched the Countess's gloved hand with his own, but she drew her arm away with a movement which was so expressive of disgust that he remained thoughtful, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, and at last he said: "Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"I think you are looking adorable."

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen. By that time they were driving up the Champs Elysées, toward the Arc de Triomphe. That great monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky and the sun seemed to be descending on it, showering fiery dust from the sky.

The stream of carriages, with sparkles of sunlight

reflected in the silver trappings of the harness and the glass of the lamps, flowed on in a double current toward the town and toward the Bois, and the Comte de Mascaret repeated: "My dear Gabrielle!"

Unable to control herself any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice: "Oh, do leave me in peace, pray! I am not even allowed to have my carriage to myself now." He pretended not to hear her and continued: "You never have looked so pretty as you do to-day."

Her patience had come to an end, and she replied with irrepressible anger: "You are making an error to notice it, for I swear to you that I will never allow you to approach me again."

The Count was decidedly stupefied and upset, and, his violent nature gaining the upper hand, he exclaimed: "What do you mean by that?" in a tone that betrayed rather the brutal master than the lover. She replied in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear: "Ah! What do I mean by that? What do I mean by that? Now I recognize you again! Do you wish me to tell everything?"

"Yes."

"Everything that has weighed on my heart since I have been the victim of your terrible selfishness?"

He had grown red with surprise and anger, and growled between his closed teeth: "Yes, tell me everything."

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a large,

auburn beard, a handsome man, a nobleman, a man of the world, who passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father; and now, for the first time since they had set out she turned toward him and looked him full in the face. "Well, you will hear some disagreeable things, but you must know that I am prepared for everything, that I fear nothing, and to-day you less than anyone."

He looked into her eyes and his voice shook with rage as he said in a low voice: "You are mad!"

"No, but I will no longer be the victim of the hateful penalty of maternity which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! I wish to take my place in society as I have a right to do, as all women have a right to do."

He grew pale again and stammered: "I do not understand you."

"Oh, yes! you understand me well enough. It is now three months since I had my last child, and as I am still very beautiful, and as you cannot spoil my figure, in spite of all your efforts, as you just now perceived, when you saw me on the doorstep, you think it is time that I should think of having another child."

"You are talking nonsense!"

"No, I am not; I am thirty years old, and I have had seven children; we have been married eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for ten years longer, after which you will leave off being jealous."

He seized her arm and squeezed it, saying: "I will not allow you to talk like that any longer."

"I shall talk to you till the end, until I have finished all I have to say to you, and if you try to prevent me, I shall raise my voice so that the two servants on the box may hear. I allowed you to come with me only for that object, for I have these witnesses who will oblige you to listen to me and to contain yourself; so now pay attention to what I say. I have always felt an antipathy to you, and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied, Monsieur. You married me in spite of myself; you forced my parents, who were in embarrassed circumstances, to give me to you, because you were rich, and they compelled me to marry you in spite of my tears.

"So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I had become your companion, ready to attach myself to you, to forget your coercive and threatening proceedings, in order that I might only remember that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it might be possible for me to love you, you became jealous, as no man ever has been before, with the base, ignoble jealousy of a spy, which was as degrading to you as it was to me. I had not been married eight months when you suspected me of every perfidiousness, and even told me so. What a disgrace! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful and from pleasing people, from being called in drawing-rooms

and also in the newspapers one of the most beautiful women in Paris, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me, and you hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of motherhood, until the time should come when I should disgust every man. Oh, do not deny it! I did not understand it for some time, but then I guessed it. You even boasted about it to your sister, who told me of it, for she is fond of me and was disgusted at your boorish coarseness.

"Ah! Remember how you have behaved in the past! How for eleven years you have compelled me to give up all society and simply be a mother to your children. Then you would grow disgusted with me and I was sent into the country, the family château, among fields and meadows. When I reappeared, still fresh, pretty, and unspoiled, still seductive and continually surrounded by admirers, hoping that at last I should live a little more like a rich young society woman, you would be seized with jealousy again, and begin once more to persecute me with that infamous and hateful desire from which you are suffering at this moment by my side. And this is not merely the desire of possessing me —for I never should have refused myself to you— but the wish to make me unsightly.

"And then that abominable and mysterious thing occurred which I was a long time in understanding (but I grew sharp by dint of watching your thoughts

and actions). You attached yourself to your children with all the security which they gave you while I bore them. You felt affection for them, with all your aversion to me, and in spite of your ignoble, jealous fears, which were momentarily allayed by your pleasure in seeing me lose my symmetry.

"Oh, how often have I noticed that joy in you! I have seen it in your eyes and guessed it. You loved your children as victories, and not because they were of your own blood. They were victories over me, over my youth, over my beauty, over my charms, over the compliments that were paid me and over those that were whispered around me without being paid to me personally. And you are proud of them; you make a parade of them; you take them out for drives in your break in the Bois de Boulogne, and you give them donkey-rides at Montmorency. You take them to matinées so that you may be seen in the midst of them, that people may say: 'What a kind father' and that it may be repeated—"

He seized her wrist with savage brutality, and squeezed it so violently that she was quiet and nearly cried out with the pain. Then he said to her in a whisper:

"I love my children, do you hear? What you have just said to me is disgraceful in a mother. But you belong to me; I am master—your master—I can exact from you what I like and when I like —and I have the law—on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong

grip of his large, muscular hand, and she, livid with pain, tried in vain to free them from that vise. The agony made her breathe hard and tears came into her eyes. "You see that I am the master and the stronger," he said. When he somewhat loosened his grip, she asked him: "Do you think that I am a religious woman?"

He was surprised and stammered "Yes."

"Do you think that I could lie if I swore to the truth of anything to you before an altar on which Christ's body is?"

"No."

"Will you go with me to some church?"

"What for?"

"You shall see. Will you?"

"If you absolutely wish it, yes."

She raised her voice and said: "Philippe!" And the coachman, bending down a little, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone toward his mistress, who continued: "Drive to St. Philippe-du-Roule." And the victoria, which had reached the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne, returned to Paris.

Husband and wife did not exchange a word further during the drive, and when the carriage stopped before the church Madame de Mascaret jumped out and entered it, followed by the Count. She went, without stopping, as far as the choir-screen, and falling on her knees at a chair, she buried her face in her hands. She prayed for a

long time, and he, standing behind her, could see that she was weeping. She wept noiselessly, as women weep when they are in poignant grief. There was a kind of undulation in her body, which ended in a little sob, hidden and stifled by her fingers.

But the Comte de Mascaret thought that the situation was lasting too long, and touched her on the shoulder. That contact recalled her to herself, as if she had been burned, and rising, she looked straight into his eyes. "This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing, whatever you may do to me. You may kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours, and one only; that I swear to you before God, who hears me here. That was the only revenge possible for me in return for all your abominable masculine tyrannies, in return for the penal servitude of childbearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? That you never will know! You may suspect everyone, but you never will find out. I gave myself to him, without love and without pleasure, only for the sake of betraying you, and he too made me a mother. Which is the child? That also you never will know. I have seven; try to find out! I intended to tell you this later, for one has not avenged oneself on a man by deceiving him unless he knows it. You have driven me to confess it today. Now I have finished."

She hurried through the church toward the open

door, expecting to hear behind her the quick steps of her husband whom she had defied and to be knocked to the ground by a blow of his fist, but she heard nothing and reached her carriage. She jumped into it at a bound, overwhelmed with anguish and breathless with fear. So she said to the coachman: "Home!" and the horses set off at a quick trot.

II

The Comtesse de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner-time as a criminal sentenced to death awaits the hour of his execution. What would her husband do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every instant she looked at the clock. Her maid had come and dressed her for the evening and had left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and announced dinner.

"Has the Count come in?"

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse. He is in the dining-room."

For a moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time before, foreseeing the tragedy that was being

rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a bottle of smelling-salts. The Count rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow and sat down. The three boys with their tutor, Abbé Martin, were on her right, and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The priest said grace, as was usual when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when guests were present. Then they began dinner. The Countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the Count scrutinized first the three boys and then the three girls with an uncertain, unhappy expression, which traveled from one to another.

He suddenly pushed his wine-glass from him; it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth; at the slight noise caused by this little accident the Countess started up from her chair, and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they continued to exchange looks, rapid as pistol-shots.

The priest, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, attempted to begin a conversation and tried various

subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The Countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, attempted to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly her husband said to her, bending forward: "Here, amid your children, will you swear to me that what you told me is true?"

The hatred fermenting in her veins suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing toward the boys and the left toward the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice and without any hesitation: "On the heads of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth."

He arose and throwing his napkin on the table with a movement of exasperation, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall; then he went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: "You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be himself again in a few days."

Then she talked with the priest and Miss Smith,

and had tender, pretty words for all her children, those sweet, gentle mother's ways that unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over she went into the drawing-room, all her children following her. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them many times and then went alone to her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that the Count would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to protect herself as a woman of the world as she would protect her life; so in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver which she had bought a few days previously. The hours went by, the clocks struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, full of nervous energy, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually during every moment of his life.

But the first gleam of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtain without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, with much amazement, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last and remained there with her eyes open, thinking, and barely under-

standing it all, without being able to guess what he intended to do.

When her maid brought her tea she handed her a letter from her husband at the same time. He told her that he was going to undertake a long journey and in a postscript added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

III

It was at the opera, between two acts of *Robert le Diable*. In the stalls the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large expanse of white shirt-front, in which gold and jeweled studs glistened; they gazed at the boxes full of ladies in decolleté gowns covered with diamonds and pearls, who expanded like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of their faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be gazed at, amid the sound of music.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra, scanned those rows of elegance, that exhibition of real or false charms, of jewels, luxury, and pretension which displayed itself in all parts of the Grand Théâtre, and one of them, Roger de Salnis, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin: "See how beautiful the Comtesse de Mascaret still is."

The older man in turn looked through his opera

glasses at a tall lady in an opposite box. She appeared to be still very young, and her striking beauty attracted all eyes in every corner of the house. Her pale complexion, of an ivory tint, gave her the appearance of a statue, while a small diamond coronet glistened on her black hair like a streak of light.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful!"

"How old do you think she is?"

"Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child and I saw her make her *début* into society when she was quite a girl. She is—she is—thirty—thirty-six."

"Impossible!"

"I am sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"She has had seven children."

"It is incredible."

"And what is more all seven are alive, as she is a very good mother. I occasionally go to the house, which is a very quiet and pleasant one, where one may see the phenomenon of the family in the midst of society."

"How very strange! And has there never been any gossip about her?"

"Never."

"But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes and no. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic tragedies which one suspects, never finds out exactly, but guesses at pretty closely."

"What is it?"

"I do not know anything about it. Mascaret leads a very fast life now, after being a model husband. So long as he remained a good spouse he had a shocking temper, was crabbed and easily took offense; but since he has been leading his present wild life he has become quite different. But one might surmise that he has some trouble, a worm gnawing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

Thereupon the two friends talked philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknowable troubles which differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, not perceived at first, give rise to in families; then Roger de Salnis, who was still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera-glasses, said: "It is almost incredible that that woman can have had seven children!"

"Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she refused to have any more, in order to take her place in society, which she seems likely to do for many years."

"Poor women!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! Eleven years in a condition of motherhood for such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her

beauty, every hope of success, every poetical ideal of a brilliant life, sacrificed to that abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for bringing children into the world."

"What would you have? It is only nature!"

"Yes, but I say that nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against nature, for she is continually bringing us back to an animal state. You may be sure that God has not put anything on this earth that is clean, pretty, elegant, or accessory to our ideal; the human brain alone has done it. It is man who has introduced a little grace, beauty, an unknown charm and mystery into creation by singing about it, interpreting it, by admiring it as a poet, idealizing it as an artist, and by explaining it through science, doubtless making mistakes, but finding ingenious reasons, hidden grace and beauty, unknown charm and mystery in the various phenomena of nature. God created only coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, who, after a few years of bestial enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the want of power of human decrepitude. He seems to have made them only in order that they may reproduce their species in an ignoble manner and then die like ephemeral insects. I said *reproduce their species in an ignoble manner* and I adhere to that expression. What is there, as a matter of fact, more ignoble and more repugnant than that act of reproduction of living

beings, against which all delicate minds always have revolted and always will revolt? Since all the organs which have been invented by this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did He not choose another method of performing that sacred mission, which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by means of material food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh renews itself of its own accord, while we are thinking about it. The olfactory organs, through which the vital air reaches the lungs, communicate all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The ear, which enables us to communicate with our fellow men, has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, infinite and even physical pleasure by means of sound! But one might say that a cynical and cunning Creator wished to prohibit man from ever ennobling and idealizing his intercourse with women. Nevertheless man has found love, which is not a bad reply to that sly Deity, and he has adorned it with so much poetry that woman often forgets the sensual part of it. Those among us who are unable to deceive themselves have invented vice and refined debauchery, which is another way of laughing at God and paying homage, immodest homage, to beauty.

"But the normal man begets children exactly like an animal coupled with another by law.

"Look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that such a jewel, such a pearl, born to be beautiful, admired, fêted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in providing heirs for the Comte de Mascaret?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh: "There is a great deal of truth in what you say, but very few persons would understand you."

Salnis became more and more animated. "Do you know how I picture God myself?" he said. "As an enormous creative organ beyond our ken, who scatters millions of worlds into space, as one single fish would deposit its spawn in the sea. He creates because it is His function as God to do so, but He does not know what He is doing and is stupidly prolific in His work and ignorant of the combinations of all kinds that are produced by His scattered germs. The human mind is a lucky little local, passing accident which was totally unforeseen, and condemned to disappear with this earth and to begin over again, perhaps here or elsewhere, the same or different, with fresh combinations of eternally new beginnings. We owe it to this little lapse of intelligence on His part that we are very uncomfortable in this world, which was not made for us, which had not been prepared to receive us, to lodge and feed us or to satisfy reflecting beings, and we owe it to Him also that we have to struggle against what are still called the designs of Providence, when we are really refined and civilized beings."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively as he had long known the surprising outbursts of his imagination, asked him: "Then you believe that human thought is the spontaneous product of blind divine generation?"

"Naturally! It is a fortuitous function of the nerve centers of our brain, like the unforeseen chemical action due to new mixtures and similar also to a charge of electricity, caused by friction or the unexpected proximity of some substance, similar to all phenomena caused by the infinite and fruitful fermentation of living matter.

"My dear fellow, the truth of this must be evident to anyone who looks about him. If the human mind, ordained by an omniscient Creator, had been intended to be what it has become, exacting, inquiring, agitated, tormented—so different from mere animal thought and resignation—would the world, which was created to receive the beings that we now are, have been this unpleasant little park for small game, this salad-patch, this wooded, rocky, and spherical kitchen-garden where your improvident Providence had destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished on the flesh of slaughtered animals, our brethren, or on raw vegetables nourished by the sun and the rain?

"It is sufficient to reflect only for a moment, in order to understand that this world was not made for such creatures as we are. Thought, which is developed by a miracle in the nerves of the cells in

our brain, powerless, ignorant and confused as it is, and as it will always remain, makes all of us who are intellectual beings eternal and wretched exiles on earth.

"Look at this earth, as God has given it to those who inhabit it. Is it not visibly and solely made, planted and covered with forests for the sake of animals? What is there for us? Nothing. For them, everything; and they have nothing to do but to eat or go hunting and eat one another, according to their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceable manners; He foresaw only the death of creatures bent on destroying and devouring one another. Are not the quail, the pigeon, and the partridge the natural prey of the hawk? the sheep, the stag, and the ox that of the great flesh-eating animals, rather than meat to be fattened and served up to us with truffles, which have been unearthed by pigs for our special benefit?

"As to ourselves, the more civilized, intellectual, and refined we are, the more we ought to conquer and subdue that animal instinct which represents the will of God in us. So, in order to mitigate our lot as brutes, we have discovered and made everything, beginning with houses, then exquisite food, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, drink, stuffs, clothes, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways, and innumerable machines, besides arts and sciences, writing and poetry. Every ideal comes from us, as do all the amenities of life, in order to make

our existence as simple reproducers, for which divine Providence solely intended us, less monotonous and less hard.

"Look at this theater. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen and unknown to eternal fate, intelligible to our minds alone, a sensual and intellectual distraction, which has been invented solely by and for that discontented and restless little animal, man?

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God intended her to live in a cave, naked or wrapped up in the skins of wild animals. But is she not better as she is? Speaking of her, does any one know why and how her brute of a husband, having such a companion by his side, and especially after having been boorish enough to make her a mother seven times, has suddenly left her, to run after bad women?"

"Oh! my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason," Grandin replied. "He found that raising a family was becoming too expensive, and from reasons of domestic economy he has arrived at the same principles which you lay down as a philosopher."

The curtain rose for the third act, and they turned round, took off their hats and sat down.

IV

The Comte and Comtesse Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them

home from the opera, without speaking. But suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!"

"Well?"

"Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years."

"What do you wish? I cannot help it."

"Then tell me which of them it is."

"Never."

"Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you and treat the child like the others."

"I have not the right to do so."

"Do you not see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am continually asking myself, this question which tortures me every time I look at them? It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize and who prevents me from loving the others?"

"Then you really have suffered very much?" she repeated.

And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture to me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably toward me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh, I shall never forget the things you said to me, but from that day I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our—of your—children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them on my knee without asking myself, 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior toward you for six years, and even kind and complaisant. Tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved,

and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me—"

"I have been more guilty than you think perhaps," she replied, "but I could no longer endure that life of continual motherhood, and I had only one means of driving you from me. I lied before God and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's heads, for I have never wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered: "Is that true?"

"It is true."

But, wild with grief, he said with a groan: "I shall have fresh doubts that never will end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me, 'It is Jacques or it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove into the courtyard of the house and when it had drawn up in front of the steps the Count alighted first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm to mount the stairs. As soon as they reached the first floor he said: "May I speak to you for a few moments longer?"

"I am quite willing," she replied.

They went into a small drawing-room and a footman, in some surprise, lighted the wax candles. As

soon as he had left the room and they were alone the Count continued: "How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have remained dumb, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now to-day you tell me that you have been lying. For six years you have actually allowed me to believe such a thing! No, you are lying now, I do not know why, but out of pity for me, perhaps?"

She replied in a sincere and convincing manner: "If I had not done so, I should have had four more children in the last six years!"

"Can a mother speak like that?"

"Oh!" she replied, "I do not feel that I am the mother of children who never have been born; it is enough for me to be the mother of those that I have and to love them with all my heart. I am a woman of the civilized world, Monsieur—we all are—and we are no longer, and we refuse to be, mere females to restock the earth."

She rose, but he seized her hands. "Only one word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth!"

"I have just told you. I have never dishonored you."

He looked her full in the face, and how beautiful she was, with her gray eyes, like the cold sky! In her dark hair sparkled the diamond coronet, like a radiance. He suddenly felt, by a kind of intuition, that this grand creature was not merely a being destined to perpetuate the race, but the strange and

mysterious product of all our complicated desires that have been accumulating in us for centuries but have been turned aside from their primitive and divine object and have wandered after a mystic, imperfectly perceived, and intangible beauty. There are some women like that, who blossom only for our dreams, adorned with every poetical attribute of civilization, with that ideal luxury, coquetry and esthetic charm which surround woman, a living statue that brightens our life.

Her husband remained standing before her, stupefied at his tardy and obscure discovery, confusedly hitting on the cause of his former jealousy and understanding it all very imperfectly. At last he said: "I believe you, for I feel at this moment that you are not lying, and before I really thought that you were."

She held out her hand to him: "We are friends, then?"

He took her hand, kissed it, and replied: "We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Then he went out, still looking at her, surprised that she was still so beautiful, and feeling a strange emotion arising within him.

THE FISHING-HOLE

CUTS and Wounds that Caused Death."

Such was the heading of the charge that brought Léopold Rénard, upholsterer, before the Assize Court.

Grouped round him were the chief witnesses: Madame Flamèche, widow of the victim, Louis Ladureau, cabinetmaker, and Jean Durdent, plumber.

Near the criminal was his wife, dressed in black, an ugly little creature, who looked like a monkey dressed as a woman.

In these words Rénard described the affair: "Heavens, gentlemen, it was a misfortune of which I am the first and the last victim, and with which my will had nothing to do. The facts are their own commentary, Monsieur le Président. I am an honest man, a hardworking man, an upholsterer in the same street for sixteen years, known, liked, respected, and esteemed by all, as my neighbors have testified—even the porter, who is not distracted every day. I like to work; I am fond of saving;

I like honest men, and respectable pleasures. That is what has ruined me, so much the worse for me; but, as my will had nothing to do with it, I continue to respect myself.

"Every Sunday, for the last five years, my wife and I have spent the day at Passy. We get fresh air, and we are very fond of fishing—as fond of it as we are of new onions. Mélie inspired me with that passion, the jade! she is more enthusiastic than I am, the vixen! and all the mischief in this business is her fault, as you will see presently.

"I am strong and mild-tempered, without a trace of malice in me. But she! oh, dear me! she looks insignificant, she is short and thin, but she does more mischief than a weasel. I do not deny that she has good qualities; she has some, and those very important to a man in business. But her disposition! Inquire about it in the neighborhood; even the porter's wife, who has just sent me about my business—she will tell you something in regard to that.

"Every day she used to find fault with my mild temper: 'I would not put up with this! I would not put up with that.' If I had listened to her, Monsieur le Président, I should have had at least three fights a month."

Madame Rénard interrupted him: "And for good reasons too; they laugh best who laugh last."

He turned toward her frankly: "Oh, very well! I can blame you, since you were the cause of it."

Facing the President again he resumed:

"We used to go to Passy every Saturday evening, so as to be able to begin fishing at daybreak the next morning. It is a habit which has become second nature with us, as the saying is. Three years ago this summer I discovered a place, oh, such a fine spot! There, in the shade, were eight feet of water at least, and perhaps ten—a hole with a hiding-place under the bank—a capital retreat for fish and a paradise for any fisherman. I might look upon that fishing-place as my property, Monsieur le Président, as I was its Christopher Columbus. Everyone in the neighborhood knew that, without making any opposition. They used to say: 'That is Rénard's place;' and no one would have gone to it, not even Monsieur Plumsay, who is renowned, if I may say so without offense, for appropriating other people's places.

"Well, I went as usual to that place, of which I felt as certain as if I owned it. I hardly reached it on Saturday, when I got into *Delila,* with my wife. *Delila* is my Norwegian boat, which I had built by Fourmaise, and which is light and safe. Well, we got into the boat and we were about to prepare our bait, and for baiting there is no one to be compared with me, and they all know it. You ask what I use for bait? I cannot answer that question; it has nothing to do with the accident; I cannot answer—that is my secret. More than three hundred persons have asked me that; they

have offered me glasses of brandy and liqueurs, fried fish and matelots, to make me tell! Ah, they have coaxed my stomach to get at my secret, my recipe. Only my wife knows, and she will not tell it, any more than I shall! Is not that so, Mélie?"

The President of the Court interrupted him:

"Come, tell us the facts as soon as you can."

The accused continued: "I am coming to them; I am coming to them. On Saturday, the eighth of July, we went by the five twenty-five train, and before dinner we went to ground-bait as usual. The weather promised to remain fine, and I said to Mélie: 'It will be fine for to-morrow!' And she replied: 'It looks like it.' We never talk more than that to each other.

"Then we returned to dinner. I was happy and thirsty, and that was the cause of everything. I said to my wife: 'Mélie, it is fine weather, so suppose I drink a bottle of *Casque à mèche*. That is a little white wine which we have christened so because, if you drink too much of it, it prevents you from sleeping and is the opposite of a nightcap. Do you understand me?

"Mélie replied: 'You may do as you please, but you will be ill again, and will not be able to get up to-morrow.' That was true, sensible, prudent, and clear-sighted, I must confess. Nevertheless, I could not withstand the temptation, and I drank my bottle. The trouble all came from that.

"Well, I could not sleep. It kept me awake till

two o'clock in the morning, and then I went to sleep so soundly that I should not have heard the angel shouting at the Last Judgment.

"In short, my wife woke me at six o'clock and I jumped out of bed, hastily put on my trousers and jersey, washed my face and jumped on board *Delila*. But it was too late, for when I arrived at my fishing-place it was already taken! Such a thing had never happened to me in three years, and it made me feel as if I were being robbed under my own eyes. I said to myself, 'Hang it all!' And then my wife began to scold me. 'Eh! What about your *Casque à mèche!* There now, you drunkard! Are you satisfied, you big fool?' I could say nothing, because it was all quite true; but I landed all the same near the spot and tried to profit by what was left. Perhaps, after all, the fellow might catch nothing and go away.

"He was a little thin man, in a white linen coat and waistcoat, and with a large straw hat; and his wife, a fat woman who was doing embroidery, sat behind him.

"When she saw us take up our position close to their place, she murmured: 'I suppose there are no other places on the river!' And my wife, who was furious, replied: 'Persons that know how to behave make inquiries about the habits of the neighborhood before occupying reserved spots.'

"As I did not want a fuss, I said to her: 'Hold your tongue, Mélie. Let them go on; we shall see.'

"Well, we had fastened *Delila* under the willow-trees, and had landed and were fishing side by side, Mélie and I, close to the two others; but here, Monsieur, I must enter into details.

"We had been there only about five minutes when our male neighbor's float began to go down two or three times, and then he pulled out a fish as thick as my thigh—a little less, perhaps, but nearly as big! My heart beat, and the perspiration stood on my forehead, and Mélie said to me: 'Well, you sot, did you see that?'

"Just then, Monsieur Bru, the Poissy grocer, who was fond of gudgeon-fishing, passed in a boat, and called out to me: 'So somebody has taken your usual place, Monsieur Rénard?' 'Yes, Monsieur Bru,' I replied; 'there are some persons in this world who do not know the usages of common politeness.'

"The little man in linen pretended not to hear, nor his fat lump of a wife, either."

Here the President interrupted him a second time: "Take care, you are insulting the widow, Madame Flamèche, who is present."

Rénard made his excuses: "I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, my anger carried me away. Well, not a quarter of an hour had passed when the little man caught another fish, and another almost immediately, and another five minutes later.

"Tears were in my eyes, and then I knew that Madame Rénard was boiling with rage, for she

kept on nagging at me: 'Oh, how mean! Don't you see that he is robbing you of your fish? Do you think that you will catch anything? Not even a frog, nothing whatever. Why, my hands are burning, just to think of it.'

"But I said to myself: 'We will wait till twelve o'clock. Then this poaching fellow will go to lunch, and I shall get my place again.' As for me, Monsieur le Président, I lunch on the spot every Sunday; we bring our provisions in *Delila*. But at twelve o'clock, that wretch produced a fowl out of a newspaper, and while he was eating, he actually caught another big fish!

"Mélie and I had a morsel also, only a mouthful, a mere nothing, for our hearts were not in it.

"Then I took up my newspaper, to aid my digestion. Every Sunday I read the *Gil Blas* in the shade like that, by the side of the water. It is Columbine's day, you know, Columbine who writes the articles in the *Gil Blas*. I usually put Madame Rénard into a passion by pretending to know this Columbine. It is not true, for I do not know her, and never have seen her, but that does not matter; she writes very well, and then she says things pretty plainly for a woman. She suits me, and there are not many of her sort.

"I began to tease my wife, but she got angry immediately, and very angry, so I held my tongue. At that moment our two witnesses, who are present here, Monsieur Ladureau and Monsieur Dur-

dent, appeared on the other side of the river. We know each other by sight. The little man began to fish again, and he caught so many fish that I trembled with vexation, and his wife said: 'It is an uncommonly good spot, and we will come here always, Desiré.' As for me, a cold chill ran down my back, and Madame Rénard kept repeating: 'You are not a man; you have the blood of a chicken in your veins'; and suddenly I said to her: 'Mélie, I would rather go away, or I shall be doing something rash.'

"She whispered to me as if she had put a red-hot iron under my nose: 'You are not a man. Now you are going to run away, and surrender your place! Off you go, Bazaine!'

"Well, I felt that, but still I did not move, while the other fellow pulled out a bream—oh, I never saw such a large one before, never! Then my wife began to talk aloud, as if she were thinking, and you can see her slyness. She said: 'That is what one might call stolen fish, seeing that we baited the place ourselves. At any rate, they ought to give us back the money we have spent on bait.'

"Then the fat woman in the cotton gown said: 'Do you mean to call us thieves, Madame?' So the women began to argue, and then they came to hot words. Oh, Lord! those creatures know some good ones. They shouted so loud that our two witnesses, who were on the other bank, began to call out by way of a joke: 'Less noise over there; you will prevent your husbands from fishing.'

"The fact is that neither of us moved any more than if we had been two tree-stumps. We remained there, with our noses over the water, as if we had heard nothing, but we heard all the same.

" 'You are a mere liar.'

" 'You are no better than a streetwalker.'

" 'You are only a trollop.'

" 'You are a regular strumpet.'

"And so on, and so on; a sailor could not have talked worse.

"Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, and turned round. It was the other one, the fat woman who had fallen on my wife with her parasol. *Bang! thump! thump!* Mélie got two blows, and she was furious. She hits hard when she is in a rage, so she caught the fat woman by the hair and then, *thump, thump.* Slaps in the face rained down like ripe plums. I should have let them go on—women among themselves, men among themselves—it does not do to mix the blows, but the little man in the linen jacket jumped up like a devil and was about to rush at my wife. Ah, no, no! not that, my friend! I caught the gentleman with the end of my fist, *smash! smash!* one on the nose, the other in the stomach. He threw up his arms and legs and fell on his back into the river, right into the fishing-hole.

"I should have fished him out most certainly, Monsieur le Président, if I had had the time. But unfortunately the fat woman got the better of it, and she was pounding Mélie terribly. I know that I

ought not to have assisted her while the man was drinking his fill, but I never thought that he would drown, and I said to myself: 'Bah, it will cool his temper.'

"So I ran up to the women to separate them, and all I received was scratches and bites. Good Lord, what creatures! It took me five minutes, and perhaps ten, to separate those two vixens. When I turned round, nothing was to be seen, and the water was as smooth as a pond. The others yonder kept shouting: 'Fish him out!' It was all very well to say that, but I cannot swim and still less dive!

"At last the man from the dam came, and two gentlemen with boat-hooks, but it had taken over a quarter of an hour. He was found at the bottom of the hole in eight feet of water, as I have said, but he was dead, the poor little man in his linen suit! There are the facts, such as I have sworn to. I am innocent, on my honor."

The witnesses having deposed to the same effect, the accused was acquitted.

THE RONDOLI FAMILY

I

ON two occasions, I intended to see Italy thoroughly, and each time I was stopped at the frontier and could not go any farther. So I do not know Italy (thus spoke my friend, Charles Jouvent). Yet those attempts gave me a charming idea of the manners of that beautiful country. Some time, however, I must visit its cities, as well as the museums and works of art in which it abounds. I will make another attempt to penetrate the interior, which I have not yet succeeded in doing.

You do not understand me, so I will explain. In the spring of 1874 I was seized with an irresistible desire to see Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. I am not a great traveler, as you know; to travel appears to me a useless and fatiguing business. Nights spent in a train, the disturbed sleep of the railway carriage, with the attendant headache and stiffness in every limb, the sudden waking in that rolling box, the unwashed feeling, with one's eyes and hair full of dust, the smell of the coal, those bad dinners in the draughty refreshment-rooms are, in

my opinion, a horrible beginning of a pleasure trip.

After this introduction, we have the miseries of the hotel; some great hotel full of people and yet so empty; the strange room and the doubtful bed! I am most particular about my bed; it is the sanctuary of life. We entrust our almost naked and fatigued bodies to it so that they may be reanimated by reposing between soft sheets and feathers. In the bed we find the most delightful hours of our existence, the hours of love and of sleep. The bed is sacred, and should be respected, venerated, and loved by us as the best and most delightful of our earthly possessions.

I cannot lift the sheets of a hotel bed without a shudder of disgust. Who occupied it the night before? Perhaps dirty, revolting people have slept in it. I begin, then, to think of all the horrible persons with whom one comes in contact every day —persons with suspicious-looking skin which makes one think of unpleasant personal details! I remember those who carry about with them the sickening smell of garlic or of humanity. I think of those who are deformed and unhealthy, of the perspiration emanating from the sick, and of everything that is ugly and filthy in man.

And all this, perhaps, has been in the bed in which I am about to sleep! The mere idea of it makes me feel ill as I get into it.

And then the hotel dinners—those dreary *table d'hôte* dinners with all sorts of extraordinary per-

sons, or else those terrible solitary dinners at a small table in a restaurant, lighted feebly by a wretched artificial candle under a shade.

Again, those terribly dull evenings in some unknown town! Do you know anything more depressing than the approach of dusk on such an occasion? One goes about almost as if in a dream, looking at faces that one never has seen before and never will see again; listening to people talking about matters which are quite indifferent to you in a language that perhaps you do not understand. You have a horrible feeling, almost as if you were lost, and you continue to walk so as not to be obliged to return to the hotel, where you would feel more lost still because you are *at home*—a home that belongs to anyone who can pay for it; and at last you sink into a chair of some well-lighted café, whose gilding and lights oppress you a thousand times more than the shadows in the streets. Then you feel so abominably lonely sitting in front of the glass of flat bock beer that a kind of madness seizes you, the longing to go somewhere or other, no matter where, so long as you need not remain before that marble table amid those dazzling lights.

Suddenly, you are aware that you are really alone in the world, always and everywhere, and that, even in places that we know well, the familiar jostlings give us only the illusion of human fraternity. At such moments of self-abandonment and somber isolation in distant cities one thinks broadly, clearly,

and profoundly. Suddenly one sees the whole of life outside of the vision of eternal hope, apart from the deceptions of our innate habits, and of our expectations of happiness, which we indulge in dreams never to be realized.

It is only by going a long distance from home that we can fully understand how short-lived and empty everything near at hand is; by searching for the unknown we perceive how commonplace and evanescent everything is; only by wandering over the face of the earth can we understand how small the world is, and how very much alike it is everywhere.

How well I know, and how I hate and almost fear, those haphazard walks through unknown streets! and this was the reason why—as nothing would induce me to undertake a tour in Italy by myself—I made up my mind to accompany my friend Paul Pavilly.

You know Paul, and how he idealizes women. To him the earth is habitable only because they are there; the sun gives light and is warm because it shines upon them; the air is soft and balmy because it blows upon their skin and ruffles the soft hair on their temples; and the moon is charming because it makes them dream and imparts a languorous charm to love. Every act and action of Paul's has woman for its motive; all his thoughts, all his efforts and hopes are centered in them.

When I first mentioned Italy to Paul he abso-

lutely refused to leave Paris. But I began to tell him of the adventures I had had on my travels. I assured him that all Italian women are charming, and I made him hope for the most refined pleasures at Naples—thanks to certain letters of introduction which I had!—and so at last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

II

Paul and I took the express one Thursday evening. Hardly anyone goes south at that time of the year, so we had the carriage to ourselves, and both of us were in a bad temper on leaving Paris, regretting that we had yielded to the temptation of this journey, thinking of Marly, the Seine, and our lazy boating excursions, and all those pleasures in and near Paris so dear to every true Parisian.

As soon as the train started Paul retired into his corner, and said: "It is most idiotic to go all that distance," and as it was too late for him to change his mind then, I said, "Well, you should not have come."

He did not reply, and I felt very much inclined to laugh when I saw how furious he looked. He certainly looks rather like a squirrel, but everyone of us has retained the type of some animal or other as the mark of his primitive origin. How many persons have jaws like a bulldog, or heads like goats, rabbits, foxes, horses, or oxen! Paul is a

squirrel turned into a man. He has its bright, quick eyes, its hair, its pointed nose, its small, fine, supple, active body, and a certain mysterious resemblance in his general bearing: in fact, a similarity of movement, of gesture, and of bearing which might almost be taken for a recollection.

At last we both went to sleep with that uncomfortable slumber of the railway carriage, which is interrupted by horrible cramps in the arms and neck, and by sudden stoppages of the train.

We awoke as we were passing beside the Rhône. Soon the continued noise of crickets came in through the window, that cry which seems to be the voice of the warm earth, the song of Provence; it seemed to instil into our looks, our breasts, and our souls the light and happy feeling of the South, that odor of the parched earth, of the light and stony soil of the olive with its gray-green foliage.

When the train stopped again a railway guard ran alongside of the carriages calling out "Valence!" in a sonorous voice, with an accent that again gave us a taste of that Provence which the shrill note of the crickets had already imparted to us.

Nothing new happened till we reached Marseilles, where we alighted for breakfast; but when we returned to our carriage we found a woman installed there.

Paul, with a delighted glance at me, gave his short moustache a mechanical twirl, and passed his fingers through his hair, which had become slightly

disordered with the night's journey. Then he sat down opposite the newcomer.

Whenever I happen to see a striking new face, either in traveling or in society, I always have an inclination to find out what character and intellectual capacities are hidden beneath those features.

She was a young and pretty woman, certainly a native of the south of France, with splendid eyes, beautiful waving black hair, which was so thick, long, and strong that it seemed almost too heavy for her head. She was dressed with a certain southern bad taste which made her look rather vulgar. Her regular features had none of the grace and finish of the refined races, of that slight delicacy which members of the aristocracy inherit from their birth, and which is the hereditary mark of thinner blood.

Her bracelets were too large to be of gold; she wore earrings with huge white stones that certainly were not diamonds, and she belonged unmistakably to the common people. One could guess that she would talk too loud, and shout on every occasion, with exaggerated gestures.

When the train started she remained motionless in her place, in the attitude of a woman who was indignant, without even looking at us.

Paul began to talk to me, evidently with an eye to effect, trying to attract her attention, as shopkeepers expose their choicer goods to catch the notice of passers.

But she did not appear to pay the least attention to him.

"Toulon! Ten minutes to wait! Refreshment-room!" the porters shouted.

Paul motioned to me to get out, and as soon as we had done so, he said:

"I wonder who on earth she can be?"

I began to laugh. "I am sure I don't know, and I don't care in the least."

But Paul was quite excited.

"She is an uncommonly fresh and pretty girl. What eyes she has, and how cross she looks! She must be very anxious about something, for she takes no notice of anything."

"You will have all your trouble for nothing," I growled.

He began to lose his temper.

"I am not taking any trouble, my dear fellow. I think her an extremely pretty woman, that is all. If one could only speak to her! But I don't know how to begin. Cannot you give me an idea? Can't you guess who she is?"

"Really, I cannot. But I should rather think she is some strolling actress who is going to rejoin her company after a love adventure."

Paul seemed quite upset, as if I had said something insulting.

"What makes you think that? On the contrary, I think she looks most respectable."

"Well, look at her bracelets," I said, "her earrings and her whole dress. I should not be at all surprised if she were a dancer or a circus-rider, but

most likely a dancer. Her whole style smacks very much of the theater."

He evidently did not like the idea.

"She is much too young for that, I am sure; why, she is barely twenty."

"Well," I replied, "there are many things one can do before one is twenty; dancing and elocution are among them."

"Take your seats for Nice, Vintimiglia," the guards and porters called.

We returned to the train; our fellow-passenger was eating an orange, and certainly she did not do it elegantly. She had spread her handkerchief on her knees, and the way in which she tore off the peel and opened her mouth to put in the pieces, and then spat the pips out of the open window, showed that her early training and habits certainly had been decidedly vulgar.

She appeared, also, more vexed than ever, and ate the fruit with an exceedingly comic air of rage.

Paul devoured her with his eyes and tried to attract her attention and excite her curiosity; but in spite of his talk, and of the manner in which he brought in well-known names, she did not pay the slightest attention to him.

After passing Fréjus and St. Raphael, the train went through a veritable garden, a paradise of roses, groves of oranges and lemons covered with fruit and flowers at the same time. That delightful coast from Marseilles to Genoa is a kingdom of perfumes in a home of flowers.

June is the time to see it in all its beauty, when in every narrow valley and on every slope, the most exquisite flowers grow luxuriantly. And the roses—fields, hedges, groves of roses! They climb up the walls, blossom on the roofs, hang from the trees, peep out from among the bushes; they are white, red, yellow, large and small, single, with simple self-colored dress, or full and heavy in brilliant toilets.

Their breath makes the air heavy and relaxing, and the still more penetrating fragrance of the orange blossoms sweetens the atmosphere till it might almost be called the refinement of odor.

The shore, with its brown rocks, was bathed by the motionless Mediterranean. The hot summer sunlight stretched like a fiery cloth over the mountains, over the long expanses of sand, and over the motionless, apparently solid, blue sea. The train went on through the tunnels, along the slopes, above the water, on straight, wall-like viaducts, and a soft, vague, saltish smell, a smell of drying seaweed, was mingled at times with the strong, heavy perfume of the flowers.

But Paul neither saw, looked at, nor smelled anything, for our fellow-traveler engrossed him.

When we reached Cannes, as he wished to speak to me, he signed to me to get out, and as soon as I did so he took me by the arm.

"Do you know, she is really charming," said he. "Just look at her eyes; and I never saw anything like her hair."

"Don't excite yourself," I replied, "or else address her, if you have any intentions that way. She does not look unapproachable, I fancy, although she appears to be a little out of temper."

"Why don't you speak to her?" he said.

"I don't know what to say, for I am always terribly stupid at first; I can never make advances to a woman in the street. I follow them, go round and round them, and quite close to them, but never know what to say at first. I tried only once to enter into conversation with a woman in that way. As I saw clearly that she was waiting for me to make overtures, and as I felt bound to say something, I stammered out, 'I hope you are quite well, Madame?' She laughed and I made my escape."

But I promised Paul to do all I could to bring about a conversation, and when we had taken our places again, I politely asked our neighbor:

"Have you any objection to the smell of tobacco, Madame?"

She merely replied, "*Non capisco.*"

So she was an Italian! I felt an absurd inclination to laugh. As Paul did not understand a word of that language, I was obliged to act as his interpreter, so I said in Italian:

"I asked you, Madame, whether you had any objection to tobacco smoke?"

With an angry look she replied, "*Che mi fa?*"

She had neither turned her head nor looked at me, and I really did not know whether to take this

"What does it matter to me?" for an authorization, a refusal, a real sign of indifference, or for a mere "Let me alone."

"Madame," I replied, "if you mind the smell of tobacco in the least——"

She said "*Mica!*" in a tone which seemed to mean, "I wish you would leave me alone!" It was, however, a kind of permission, so I said to Paul: "You may smoke."

He looked at me in that curious sort of way that people have when they try to understand others who are speaking a strange language before them, and asked:

"What did you say to her?"

"I asked whether we might smoke, and she said we might do whatever we liked."

Whereupon I lighted my cigar.

"Didn't she say anything more?"

"If you had counted her words you would have noticed that she used exactly six, two of which gave me to understand that she knew no French, so four remained, and much can be said in four words."

Paul seemed quite unhappy, disappointed, and at sea, so to speak.

But suddenly the Italian asked me, in that tone of discontent which seemed habitual to her, "Do you know at what hour we shall reach Genoa?"

"At eleven o'clock," I replied. Then after a moment I added:

"My friend and I are also going to Genoa, and

if we can be of any service to you, we shall be very happy, as you are quite alone." But she interrupted with such a "*Mica!*" that I did not venture another word.

"What did she say?" Paul asked.

"She said she thought you were charming."

But he was in no humor for joking, and begged me dryly not to make fun of him; so I translated her question and my polite offer, which had been so rudely rejected.

Then he really became as restless as a caged squirrel.

"If we only knew," he said, "what hotel she is going to, we would go to the same. Try to find out, so as to have another opportunity to make her talk."

This was not particularly easy, and I did not know what pretext to invent, desirous as I was to make the acquaintance of this unapproachable person.

We passed Nice, Monaco, Mentone, and the train stopped at the frontier for the examination of luggage.

Although I hate those ill-bred people who breakfast and dine in railway-carriages, I went out and bought a quantity of good things to make one last attack on her by their means. I felt sure that this girl must be by no means inaccessible ordinarily. Something had vexed her and made her irritable, but very little would suffice, a mere word or some

agreeable offer, to attract her and vanquish her.

We went on again, and we three were still alone. I spread my luncheon on the seat. I cut up the fowl, put the slices of ham neatly on a piece of paper, and then carefully laid out our dessert—strawberries, plums, cherries, and cakes—close to the girl.

When she saw that we were about to eat she took from her pocket a piece of chocolate and two little crisp cakes and began to munch them.

"Ask her to have some of ours," Paul whispered.

"That is exactly what I wish to do, but it is a rather difficult matter."

But as she glanced from time to time at our provisions, I felt sure that she would still be hungry when she had finished what she had with her; so, as soon as her frugal meal was over, I said to her:

"It would be very kind of you if you would take some of this fruit."

Again she said "*Mica!*" but less surlily than before.

"Well, then," I said, "may I offer you a little wine? I see you have not drunk anything. It is Italian wine, and as we are now in your own country, we should be very pleased to see such a pretty Italian mouth accept the offer of its French neighbors."

She shook her head slightly, evidently wishing to refuse, but very desirous of accepting, and her *mica* this time was almost polite. I took the flask,

which was covered with straw in the Italian fashion, and filling the glass I offered it to her.

"Please drink it," I said, "to bid us welcome to your country."

She took the glass with her usual look, and emptied it at a draught, like a woman consumed with thirst, and then gave it back to me without even saying "Thank you."

I then offered her the cherries. "Please take some," I said; "we shall be so delighted if you will."

Out of her corner she looked at all the fruit spread out beside her, and said so rapidly that I could scarcely follow her: *"A me non piacciono ne le ciriegie ne le susine; amo soltano le fragole."*

"What does she say?" Paul asked.

"That she does not care for cherries or plums, but only for strawberries."

I put a newspaper full of wild strawberries on her lap, and she ate them quickly, tossing them into her mouth from some distance in a coquettish and charming manner. When she had finished the little red heap, which soon disappeared under the rapid movement of her hands, I asked:

"What may I offer you now?"

"I will take a little chicken," she replied.

She certainly devoured half of it, tearing it to pieces with the rapid movements of her jaws, like some carnivorous animal. Then she made up her mind to have some cherries, which she "did not

like," and then some plums, then some little cakes. Then she said, "I have had enough," and sat back in her corner.

I was much amused, and tried to make her eat more, insisting, in fact, till she suddenly flew into a rage, and flung such a furious *Mica* at me that I would no longer take the risk of spoiling her digestion.

I turned to my friend. "My poor Paul," I said, "I am very much afraid we have had our trouble for nothing."

Night came on, one of those hot summer nights that extend their warm shade over the burning and exhausted earth. Here and there, in the distance, by the sea, on capes and promontories, bright stars, which at times I was almost inclined to confound with lighthouses, began to shine on the dark horizon.

The scent of the orange-trees became more penetrating, and we breathed with delight, distending our lungs to inhale it more deeply. The balmy air was soft, delicious, almost divine.

Suddenly I noticed something like a shower of stars under the dense shade of the trees along the line, where it was quite dark. It might have been taken for drops of light, leaping, flying, playing and running amongst the leaves, or for small stars fallen from the skies in order to have an excursion on the earth; but they were only fireflies dancing a strange fiery ballet in the perfumed air.

One of them happened to come into our carriage,

and shed its intermittent light, which seemed to be extinguished one moment and to be burning the next. I covered the carriage-lamp with its blue shade and watched the strange insect careering about in its fiery flight. Suddenly it settled on the dark hair of our neighbor, who was half dozing after dinner. Paul seemed delighted, with his eyes fixed on the bright, sparkling spot, which looked like a living jewel on the forehead of the sleeping woman.

The Italian woke up about eleven o'clock, with the bright insect still in her hair. When I saw her move, I said: "We are just getting to Genoa, Madame," and she murmured, without answering me, as if possessed by some obstinate and embarrassing thought:

"What shall I do, I wonder?"

Suddenly she asked:

"Would you like me to come with you?"

I was so taken aback that I did not understand.

"With us? How do you mean?"

She repeated, looking more and more furious:

"Would you like me to be your guide now, as soon as we get out of the train?"

"I am quite willing; but where do you wish to go?"

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of supreme indifference.

"Wherever you like; what does it matter to me?" She repeated her "*Che mi fa?*" twice.

"But we are going to the hotel."

"Very well, let us all go to the hotel," she said, in a contemptuous voice.

I turned to Paul, and said:

"She wishes to know whether we should like her to come with us."

My friend's utter surprise restored my self-possession. He stammered:

"With us? Where to? What for? How?"

"I don't know, but she made this strange proposal to me in a most irritated voice. I told her that we were going to the hotel, and she said: 'Very well, let us all go there!' I suppose she is without a penny. She certainly has a very strange way of making acquaintances."

Paul, who was very much excited, exclaimed:

"I am quite agreeable. Tell her that we will go wherever she likes." Then, after a moment's hesitation, he said uneasily:

"We must know, however, with whom she wishes to go—with you or with me?"

I turned to the Italian, who did not even seem to be listening to us, and said:

"We shall be very happy to have you with us but my friend wishes to know whether you will take my arm or his?"

She opened her black eyes wide with vague surprise, and said, *"Che mi fa?"*

I was obliged to explain myself. "In Italy, I believe, when a man looks after a woman, fulfils all her wishes, and satisfies all her caprices, he is called

a *patito*. Which of us two will you take for your *patito?*"

Without the slightest hesitation she replied:

"You!"

I turned to Paul. "You see, my friend, she chooses me; you have no chance."

"All the better for you," he replied, in a rage. Then, after thinking for a few moments, he said:

"Do you really care about taking this creature with you? She will spoil our journey. What are we to do with this woman, who looks like I don't know what? They will not admit us at any decent hotel."

But I had just begun to find the Italian much more attractive than I had thought her at first, and I was now very desirous to take her with us. In fact, the idea delighted me!

"My dear fellow, we have accepted," I replied, "and it is too late to recede. You were the first to advise me to consent."

"It is very stupid," he growled, "but do as you please."

The train whistled, slackened speed, and we glided into the station.

I got out of the carriage, and offered my new companion my hand. She jumped out lightly, and I gave her my arm, which she took with an air of seeming repugnance. As soon as we had claimed our luggage we set off into the town, Paul walking in glum silence.

"To what hotel shall we go?" I asked him. "It may be difficult to get into the Ville de Paris with a woman, especially with this Italian."

Paul interrupted me. "Yes, with an Italian who looks more like one of the demi-monde than a duchess. However, that is no business of mine. Do just as you please."

"I was in a state of perplexity. I had written to the Ville de Paris to retain our rooms, and now I did not know what to do.

Two commissionaires followed us with our luggage. I continued: "You might as well go on first, and say that we are coming; and give the landlord to understand that I have a—a friend with me, and that we should like rooms quite by themselves for us three, so as not to be brought in contact with other travelers. He will understand, and we will decide according to his answer."

But Paul growled: "Thank you, such commissions and such parts do not suit me, by any means. I did not come here to prepare your apartments or to minister to your pleasures."

"Look here, don't be angry," I said. "It is surely far better to go to a good hotel than to a bad one, and it is not difficult to ask the landlord for three separate bedrooms as well as a dining-room."

I put a stress on *three,* and that decided him.

He preceded us, and I saw him go into a large hotel while I remained on the other side of the street, leading my fair Italian, who did not say a

word, and followed by the porters with the luggage.

Paul came back at last, looking as dissatisfied as my companion.

"That is settled," he said, "and they will take us in; but there are only two bedrooms. You must settle it as you can."

I followed him, rather ashamed of going in with such a strange companion.

There were two bedrooms separated by a small sitting-room. I ordered a cold supper, and then I turned to the Italian with a perplexed look.

"We have been able to get only two rooms, so you must choose which of us pleases you."

She replied with her eternal *"Che mi fa?"* I thereupon took up her little black wooden trunk, such as servants use, and took it into the room on the right, which I had chosen for her—for us. A bit of paper was fastened to the box, on which was plainly written, *Mademoiselle Francesca Rondoli, Genoa.*

"Your name is Francesca?" I asked, and she nodded her head, without replying.

"We shall have supper directly," I continued. "Meanwhile, I daresay you would like to arrange your toilet a little?"

She answered with a *Mica,* a word which she employed just as frequently as *Che mi fa,* but I went on: "It is always pleasant after a journey."

Then I suddenly remembered that perhaps she

had not the necessary requisites, for she appeared to me in a very singular position, as if she had just escaped from some disagreeable adventure; so I brought her my own dressing-case.

I laid out all the little instruments for cleanliness and comfort which it contained; a nail-brush, a new toothbrush—I always carry a selection of them about with me—my nail-scissors, a nail-file, and sponges. I uncorked a bottle of eau de cologne, one of lavender-water, and a little bottle of new-mown hay, so that she might have a choice. Then I opened my powder-box, and laid out the powder-puff, placed my fine towels over the water-jug, and a new piece of soap near the basin.

She watched my movements with a look of annoyance in her wide-open eyes, without appearing either astonished or pleased at my forethought.

"Here is all that you require," I then said; "I will tell you when supper is ready."

When I returned to the sitting-room I found that Paul had taken possession of the other room, and had shut himself in, so I sat down to wait.

A waiter went to and fro, bringing plates and glasses. He laid the table slowly, then put a cold chicken on it, and told me that all was ready.

I knocked gently at Mademoiselle Rondoli's door. "Come in," she said, and when I did so I was struck by a strong, heavy smell of perfumes, as if I were in a hairdresser's and perfumer's shop.

The Italian was sitting on her trunk in an atti-

tude either of thoughtful discontent or absentmindedness. The towel remained folded over the water-jug still full of water, and the soap, untouched and dry, was lying beside the empty basin; but one would have thought that the young woman had drunk half the contents of the bottles of perfume. The eau-de-cologne, however, had been spared, as only about a third of it had gone; but to make up for that she had used a surprising amount of lavender-water and new-mown hay. A cloud of violet-powder, a vague white mist, seemed still to be floating in the air, from the effects of her over-powdering her face and neck. It seemed to cover her eyelashes, eyebrows, and the hair on her temples like snow, while her cheeks were plastered with it, and layers of it covered her nostrils, the corners of her eyes, and her chin.

When she rose she exhaled such a strong odor of mingled perfumes that it almost made me feel faint.

When we sat down to supper, I found that Paul was in a most execrable temper, and I could get nothing out of him but blame, irritable words, and disagreeable remarks.

Mademoiselle Francesca ate like an ogre, and as soon as she had finished her meal she threw herself upon the sofa in the sitting-room. Sitting down beside her, I said gallantly, kissing her hand:

"Shall I have the bed prepared, or will you sleep on the couch?"

"It is all the same to me. *Che mi fa?*"

Her indifference vexed me.

"Should you like to retire at once?"

"Yes, I am very sleepy."

She got up, yawned, gave her hand to Paul, who took it with a furious look, and I lighted her into the bedroom. An uneasy feeling haunted me. "Here is all you want," I said again.

This time I took care to pour half the water into the basin, and to lay a towel near the soap.

Then I returned to Paul. As soon as I entered the room, he said, "A nice sort of camel you have there!" I answered, laughing, "My dear boy, don't speak ill of sour grapes," and he replied, ill-temperedly:

"Only take care how this ends, my boy."

I almost trembled with that feeling of fear which assails us after some suspicious love escapade—that fear which spoils pleasant evenings, unexpected caresses, chance kisses. But I put a bold face on the matter. "At any rate, the girl is no adventuress."

But Paul had me in his power; he had seen the shadow of anxiety on my face.

"What do you know about her? You really astonish me. You fall in with an Italian woman traveling alone, and she volunteers, with most singular cynicism, to accompany us; you take her to the first hotel you come to, and then you declare that she is not a common trull! And you persuade

yourself that you are not taking more risk than if you were to go and spend the night with a woman who had smallpox."

He laughed, an unpleasant and angry laugh. I sat down, a prey to uneasiness. What was I to do, for he was right, after all?

He added: "Do as you like; I have warned you, so do not complain of the consequences."

But I saw an ironical gayety in his eyes, a delight in his revenge, and he made sport of me so jovially that I did not hesitate any longer. I gave him my hand, and said, "Good-night. You know the old saying: 'A victory without peril is a triumph without glory,' and upon my word, the victory is worth the danger."

And with a firm step I left him for the night.

I stopped short before the half-open door of Francesca's room in utter astonishment. She was already asleep. Weariness had overcome her as she finished undressing, and she was reposing in the charming attitude of one of Titian's women.

It appeared that she had lain down from sheer fatigue in order to take off her stockings, for they were lying on the bed. Then she had thought of something pleasant, no doubt, for she had waited to finish her reverie before moving, and then, closing her eyes, had lost consciousness. A nightgown, embroidered about the neck, such as one buys in cheap ready-made shops, was lying on a chair.

She was charming, young, firm and fresh.

Nothing is prettier than a pretty woman asleep; and in a moment, seeing her thus in all her native charms, I was about to forget my friend's prudent counsels; but, suddenly turning to the dressing-table, I saw everything in the same state in which I had left it, and I sat down, anxious, and a prey to irresolution.

I remained thus for a long time, not able to make up my mind what to do. I had no thought of sleeping, for my head was too excited and my eyes too much occupied. I moved about nervously, feverish, uncomfortable. Then I began to reason with myself, certainly with a view to capitulation.

I undressed slowly, and then stretched myself out against the wall, turning my back firmly on temptation.

In this position I remained for a long time without going to sleep, when suddenly my neighbor awoke. She opened her eyes with astonishment, and still with that discontented look in them; then, perceiving that she was undressed, she rose and calmly put on her night-dress with as much indifference as if I had not been present.

Then, not troubling herself at all about me, she immediately went quietly to sleep again, with her head resting on her right arm.

As for me, I began to meditate on human weakness and fatuity, and then I went to sleep also.

She arose early, like a woman who is accustomed to work. She awoke me by doing so, and I watched her through my half-closed eyelids.

She came and went without hurrying herself, as if she were astonished at having nothing to do. Presently she went to the dressing-table, and in a moment emptied all my bottles of perfume. She certainly used some water also, but very little.

When she was quite dressed, she sat down on her trunk again, and, clasping one knee between her hands, appeared to be thinking.

At that moment I pretended to notice her for the first time, and said: "Good morning, Francesca."

Without seeming in at all a better temper than the previous night, she murmured, "Good morning."

When I asked her whether she had slept well, she nodded her head, and jumping out of bed I went and kissed her.

She turned her face toward me like a child who is being kissed against its will; but I took her tenderly in my arms, and gently pressed my lips on her eyelids which she closed with evident distaste under my kisses on her fresh cheeks and full lips, which she turned away.

"You don't seem to like being kissed," I said to her.

"*Mica!*" was her only answer.

I sat down on the trunk by her side, and passing my arm through hers, I said: "*Mica! mica! mica!* in reply to everything. I shall call you Mademoiselle *Mica,* I think."

For the first time I fancied I saw the shadow of

a smile on her lips, but it passed so quickly that I may have been mistaken.

"But if you never say anything but *Mica* I shall not know what to do to please you. Let us see; what shall we do to-day?"

She hesitated a moment, as if some fancy had flitted through her head, and then she said carelessly: "It is all the same to me; what you like."

"Very well, Mademoiselle *Mica,* we will have a carriage and go for a drive."

"As you please," she said.

Paul was waiting for us in the dining-room, looking as bored as third parties usually do in love-affairs. I assumed a delighted air, and shook hands with him with triumphant energy.

"What are you thinking of doing?" he asked.

"First of all, we will go out and see a little of the town, and then we might get a carriage and take a drive in the neighborhood."

We breakfasted almost in silence and then set out. I dragged Francesca from palace to palace, and she either looked at nothing or merely glanced carelessly at the various masterpieces. Paul followed us, growling all sorts of disagreeable things. Then we all three took a drive in silence into the country and returned to dinner.

The next day it was the same thing and the next day again; and on the third Paul said to me: "See here, I am going to leave you; I shall not stay here for three weeks watching you make love to this creature."

I was perplexed and annoyed, for to my great surprise I had become singularly attached to Francesca. A man is but weak and foolish, carried away by the merest trifle, and a coward every time that his senses are excited or mastered. I clung to this unknown girl, silent and dissatisfied as she always was. I liked her somewhat ill-tempered face, the dissatisfied droop of her mouth, the weariness of her look; I liked her fatigued movements, the contemptuous way in which she let me kiss her, the very indifference of her caresses. A secret bond, that mysterious bond of physical love, which does not satisfy, bound me to her. I told Paul so, quite frankly. He treated me as if I were a fool, and then said:

"Very well, take her with you."

But she obstinately refused to leave Genoa, without giving any reason. I besought, I reasoned, I promised, but all was of no avail, and so I stayed on.

Paul declared that he would go by himself, and went so far as to pack his portmanteau; but he remained all the same.

Thus a fortnight passed. Francesca was always silent and irritable, lived beside me rather than with me, responded to all my requirements and all my propositions with her perpetual *Che mi fa?* or with her no less perpetual *Mica.*

My friend became more and more furious, but my only answer was, "You can go if you are tired of staying. I am not keeping you."

Then he called me names, overwhelmed me with reproaches, and exclaimed: "Where do you think I can go now? We had three weeks at our disposal, and here is a fortnight gone! I cannot continue my journey now; and, in any case, I shall not go to Venice, Florence, and Rome all by myself. But you will pay for it, and more dearly than you think, most likely. You can not bring a man all the way from Paris in order to shut him up at a hotel in Genoa with an Italian adventuress."

When I told him, very calmly, to return to Paris, he exclaimed that he intended to do so the very next day; but the next day he was still there, still in a rage and swearing.

By this time we began to be known in the streets through which we wandered from morning till night. Sometimes French people would turn round astonished at meeting their fellow-countrymen in the company of this girl with her striking costume, who looked singularly out of place, not to say compromising, beside us.

She used to walk along, leaning on my arm, without looking at anything. Why did she remain with me, with us, who seemed to do so little to amuse her? Who was she? Where did she come from? What was she doing? Had she any plan or idea? Where did she live? As an adventuress, or by chance meetings? I tried in vain to find out and to explain it. The better I knew her the more enigmatical she became. She seemed to be a girl

of poor family who had been taken away, and then cast aside and lost. What did she think would become of her, or for whom was she waiting? She certainly did not appear to be trying to make a conquest of me, or to make any real profit out of me.

I tried to question her, to speak to her of her childhood and family; but she never gave me an answer. I stayed with her, my heart unfettered and my senses fascinated, never wearied of holding her in my arms, that proud and quarrelsome woman, captivated by my senses, or rather carried away, overcome by a youthful, healthy, powerful charm, which emanated from her fragrant person and from the well-moulded lines of her body.

Another week passed, and the term of my journey was drawing on, for I had to be back in Paris by the eleventh of July. By this time Paul had come to take his part in the adventure, though still grumbling at me, while I invented pleasures, distractions, and excursions to amuse Francesca and my friend; and in order to do this I gave myself a great amount of trouble.

One day I proposed an excursion to Santa Margharita, that charming little town in the midst of gardens, hidden at the foot of a slope which stretches far into the sea up to the village of Portofino. We three walked along the excellent road which winds along at the foot of the mountain. Suddenly Francesca said to me: "I shall not be able to go with you to-morrow; I must go and see some of my relatives."

That was all; I did not ask her any questions, as I was quite sure she would not answer me.

The next morning she arose very early. When she spoke to me it was in a constrained and hesitating voice:

"If I do not come back again, shall you come and fetch me?"

"Most certainly I shall," was my reply. "Where must I go to find you?"

Then she explained: "You must go into the Street Victor-Emmanuel, down the Passage Falene, and into the furniture shop at the bottom, in a court, and there you must ask for Madame Rondoli.—That is the place."

And so she went away, leaving me rather astonished.

When Paul saw that I was alone, he stammered out: "Where is Francesca?" And when I told him what had happened, he exclaimed:

"My dear fellow, let us make use of our opportunity and bolt; as it is, our time is up. Two days, more or less, make no difference. Let us go at once; go and pack up your things. Off we go!"

But I refused. I could not, as I told him, leave the girl in such a manner, after living with her for nearly three weeks. At any rate, I ought to say good-by to her, and make her accept a present; I certainly had no intention of behaving badly to her.

But he would not listen; he pressed and worried me, but I would not give way.

I remained indoors for several hours, expecting Francesca's return, but she did not come, and at last, at dinner, Paul said with a triumphant air: "She has thrown you over, my dear fellow; it is certainly very strange."

I must acknowledge that I was surprised and rather vexed. He laughed in my face, and made fun of me.

"It is not exactly a bad way of getting rid of you, though rather primitive. 'Just wait for me, I shall be back in a moment,' they often say. How long are you going to wait? I should not wonder if you were foolish enough to go and look for her at the address she gave you. 'Does Madame Rondoli live here, please?' 'No, Monsieur.' I'll wager that you are longing to go there."

"Not in the least," I protested, "and I assure you that if she does not come back to-morrow morning I shall leave by the express at eight o'clock. I shall have waited twenty-four hours, and that is enough; my conscience will be quite clear."

I spent an uneasy and unpleasant evening, for I really had at heart a very tender feeling for her. I went to bed at twelve o'clock, and hardly slept at all. I arose at six, called Paul, packed my things, and two hours later we set out for France.

III

The next year, at just about the same period, I

was seized, as one is with a periodical fever, with a new desire to go to Italy, and I immediately made up my mind to carry it into effect. There is no doubt that every really well-educated man ought to see Florence, Venice, and Rome. This travel has, also, the additional advantage of providing many subjects of conversation in society, and of giving one an opportunity for bringing forward artistic generalities which appear profound.

This time I went alone, and I arrived at Genoa at the same time as the year before, but without any adventure on the road. I went to the same hotel, and actually happened to have the same room.

I was hardly in bed when the recollection of Francesca which, since the evening before, had been floating vaguely through my mind, haunted me with strange persistency. I thought of her nearly the whole night, and by degrees the wish to see her again seized me, a confused desire at first, which gradually grew stronger and more intense. At last I made up my mind to spend the next day in Genoa to try to find her, and if I should not succeed, to take the evening train.

Early in the morning I set out on my search. I remembered perfectly the directions she had given me when she left me—Victor-Emmanuel Street, house of the furniture-dealer, at the bottom of the yard on the right.

I found it without the least difficulty, and I knocked at the door of a somewhat dilapidated-look-

ing dwelling. It was opened by a stout woman, who once must have been very handsome, but who at present was only very dirty. Although she had too much *embonpoint,* she still bore the lines of majestic beauty; her untidy hair fell over her forehead and shoulders, and one fancied one could see her floating about in an enormous dressing-gown covered with spots of dirt and grease. Round her neck she wore a great gilt necklace, and on her wrists were splendid bracelets of Genoa filigree-work.

In a rather hostile manner she asked me what I wanted, and I replied by requesting her to tell me whether Francesca Rondoli lived there.

"What do you want with her?" she asked.

"I had the pleasure of meeting her last year, and I should like to see her again."

The old woman looked at me suspiciously.

"Where did you meet her?" she asked.

"Why, here in Genoa itself."

"What is your name? "

I hesitated a moment, and then I told her. I had hardly done so when the Italian put out her arms as if to embrace me. "Oh! you are the Frenchman; how glad I am to see you! But what grief you caused the poor child! She waited for you a month; yes, a whole month. At first she thought you would come to fetch her. She wanted to see whether you loved her. If you only knew how she cried when she saw that you were not coming! She cried till she seemed to have no tears left. Then

she went to the hotel, but you had gone. She thought that most likely you were traveling in Italy, and that you would return by Genoa to fetch her, as she would not go with you. And she waited more than a month, Monsieur; and she was so unhappy; so unhappy. I am her mother."

I really felt a little disconcerted, but I regained my self-possession, and asked: "Where is she now?"

"She has gone to Paris with a painter, a delightful man, who loves her very much, and who gives her everything she wants. Just look at what she sent me; they are very pretty, are they not?"

And she showed me, with southern animation, her heavy bracelets and necklace. "I have also," she continued, "earrings with stones in them, a silk dress, and some rings; but I wear them only on grand occasions. Oh, she is very happy, Monsieur, very happy! She will be so pleased when I tell her you have been here. But do come in and sit down. You will take something or other, surely?"

I refused, as I now wished to get away by the first train; but she took me by the arm and pulled me in, saying:

"Please come in; I must tell her that you have been in here."

I found myself in a small, rather dark room, furnished with only a table and a few chairs.

She continued: "Oh, she is very happy now, very happy. When you met her in the train she

was very miserable; she had had an unfortunate love-affair at Marseilles, and she was coming home, poor child. But she liked you at once, though she was still rather sad, you understand. Now she has all she wants, and she writes and tells me everything that she does. His name is Bellemin, and they say he is a great painter in your country. He fell in love with her at first sight. But you will take a glass of sirup?—it is very good. Are you quite alone, this year?"

"Yes," I said, "quite alone."

I felt an increasing inclination to laugh, as my first disappointment was dispelled by what Mother Rondoli said. I was obliged, however, to drink a glass of her sirup.

"So you are quite alone?" she continued. "How sorry I am that Francesca is not here now; she would have been company for you all the time you stayed. It is not very amusing to go about all by oneself, and she will be very sorry also."

Then, as I was rising to go, she exclaimed:

"But would you not like Carlotta to go with you? She knows all the walks very well. She is my second daughter, Monsieur."

No doubt she took my look of surprise for consent, for she opened the inner door and called out up the dark stairs which I could not see:

"Carlotta! Carlotta! make haste down, my dear child."

I tried to protest, but she would not listen.

"No; she will be very glad to go with you; she is very nice, and much more cheerful than her sister, and she is a good girl, a very good girl, whom I love very much."

In a few moments a tall, slender, dark girl appeared, her hair hanging down, and her youthful figure showing unmistakably beneath an old dress of her mother's.

The latter at once told her how matters stood.

"This is Francesca's Frenchman, you know, the one whom she knew last year. He is quite alone, and has come to look for her, poor fellow; so I told him that you would go with him to keep him company."

The girl looked at me with her handsome dark eyes, and said, smiling:

"I have no objection, if he wishes it."

Of course I could not refuse, and simply said:

"Certainly, I shall be very glad of your company."

Her mother pushed her out. "Go and get dressed directly; put on your blue gown and your hat with the flowers, and make haste."

As soon as she had left the room the old woman explained herself: "I have two others, but they are much younger. It costs a lot of money to bring up four children. Luckily the eldest is off my hands at present."

Then she told all about herself, about her husband, who had been an employé on the railway, but

who was dead, and she expatiated on the good qualities of Carlotta, her second girl, who soon returned, dressed, as her sister had been in a striking, peculiar manner.

Her mother examined her from head to foot, and, after finding everything right, she said:

"Now, my children, you may go." Then turning to the girl, she said: "Be sure you are back by ten o'clock to-night; you know the door is locked then." The answer was:

"Very well, mamma; don't worry yourself."

She took my arm and we went wandering about the streets, just as I had wandered the previous year with her sister.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, and then I took my new friend to Santa Margharita, as I had taken her sister the year previously.

During the whole fortnight which I had at my disposal I took Carlotta to all the places of interest in and about Genoa. She gave me no cause to regret her sister.

She wept when I left her, and on the morning of my departure I gave her four bracelets for her mother, besides a substantial token of my affection for herself.

One of these days I intend to return to Italy, and I cannot help remembering with a certain amount of uneasiness, mingled with hope, that Madame Rondoli has two more daughters.

CHALI

I

ONCE upon a time I had a very singular adventure," said the Admiral Vallée, who had been dozing in his armchair. His voice was like an old woman's and he had that fixed, dry, wrinkled smile, like Voltaire's, that made people think he was a confirmed skeptic.

"I was thirty years old and first lieutenant in the navy, when I took charge of an astronomical expedition to Central India. The English government provided me with all the necessary money for carrying out my enterprise, and I was soon occupied, with a few assistants, in that strange, surprising country.

"It would take ten volumes to describe our journey. I went through wonderful, magnificent regions, and was received by strange handsome princes, who entertained me with incredible splendor. For two months it seemed to me as if I were one of the figures in a poet's dream in a fairy kingdom, on the back of imaginary elephants. In the midst of wild forests I discovered extraordinary

ruins, delicate and chiseled like jewels, apparently as fragile as lace yet enormous as mountains—fabulous, divine monuments, so graceful that one falls in love with their forms, as one falls in love with a woman, and feels a physical and sensuous pleasure in looking at them. As Victor Hugo says, 'Although wide awake, I was walking in a dream.'

"Toward the end of my journey I reached Ganhard, which formerly was one of the most prosperous towns in Central India; it is now much decayed and is governed by a wealthy, arbitrary, violent, generous, and cruel prince. His name is Rajah Maddan, a true Oriental potentate, delicate and barbarous, affable and sanguinary, combining feminine gentleness with pitiless ferocity.

"The city lies at the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a little lake, surrounded by pagodas, the walls of which are washed by its waters.

"At a distance the city looks like a white spot, which grows larger as one approaches it; and gradually one descries the domes and spires, all the slender and graceful characteristics of Indian architecture.

"At about an hour's distance from the gates, I met a superbly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by a guard of honor, which the sovereign had sent me, and I was conducted to the palace with great ceremony.

"I should have liked to take time to put on my gala uniform, but royal impatience would not admit

of it. The Rajah was desirous to make my acquaintance, to know what he might expect from me.

"I was introduced into a great hall surrounded by galleries, amid a group of bronze-colored soldiers in splendid uniforms; all about me stood men dressed in striking robes studded with precious stones.

"I saw a shining mass, a kind of resplendent sun, reposing on a bench like our garden benches, without a back; it was the Rajah, who was waiting for me, motionless, in a robe of the purest canary color. He had about ten or fifteen million francs' worth of diamonds on his person, and alone on his forehead glistened the famous star of Delhi, which has always belonged to the illustrious dynasty of the Pariharas of Mundore, from whom my host was descended.

"He was a man of about five-and-twenty, who appeared to have some negro blood in his veins, although he was of the purest Hindu race. He had large, almost motionless and expressionless eyes, full lips, a curling beard, low forehead, and dazzling sharp white teeth, which he frequently showed in a mechanical smile. He arose and gave me his hand in the English fashion, and then made me sit beside him on a bench which was so high that my feet hardly touched the ground, and I was very uncomfortable.

"He immediately proposed a tiger hunt for the next day. War and hunting were his chief occu-

pations, and he could hardly understand how one could care for anything else. He was evidently fully persuaded that I had come all that distance only to amuse him a little and to be the companion of his pleasures.

"As I stood greatly in need of his assistance, I tried to flatter his tastes, and he was so pleased that he immediately wished to show me how his trained boxers fought, and led the way into a kind of arena situated within the palace.

"At his command two naked men appeared, their hands covered with steel claws. They immediately began the attack, trying to strike each other with these sharp weapons, which left long cuts, from which the blood flowed freely down their dark skin.

"This lasted till their bodies were a mass of wounds, from tearing each other's flesh with this sort of rake with sharp-pointed prongs. One of them had his jaw smashed, while the ear of the other was split into three pieces.

"The Prince looked on with ferocious pleasure, uttered grunts of delight, and imitated all their movements with careless gestures, crying out continually:

" 'Strike, strike hard!'

"One fell down unconscious, and had to be carried out of the arena, covered with blood, while the Rajah uttered a sigh of regret because it was so soon over.

"He turned to me to know my opinion; I was

disgusted, but applauded loudly. He then gave orders that I was to be conducted to Couch-Mahal —the palace of pleasure—where I was to be lodged.

"This bijou palace was situated at the extremity of the royal park, and one of its walls was built into the sacred lake of Vihara. It was square and had three rows of galleries with colonnades of most beautiful architecture. At each angle were light, lofty, or low towers, either single or in pairs; no two were alike, and they looked like flowers growing out of that graceful plant of Oriental beauty. All were surmounted by fantastic roofs, like the coquettish hats of ladies.

"In the middle of the edifice a large white dome raised its round cupola beside a beautiful clock-tower.

"The whole building was sculptured in arabesques from top to bottom, those exquisite traceries which delight the eye; motionless processions of delicate figures whose attitudes and gestures told in stone the story of Indian manners and customs.

"The rooms were lighted by arched windows overlooking the gardens. On the marble floor were graceful bouquets designed in onyx, lapis-lazuli, and agate.

"I had barely time to finish my toilet when Haribada, a court dignitary who was specially charged to communicate with me, announced his sovereign's visit.

"The saffron-colored Rajah appeared, again

shook hands with me, and began to tell me a thousand different things, continually asking me for my opinion, which I had great difficulty in giving him. Then he wished to show me the ruins of the former palace at the other extremity of the gardens.

"This was a real forest of stones inhabited by a tribe of large apes. On our approach the males began to run along the walls, making the most hideous faces at us, while the females ran away, carrying off their young in their arms. The Rajah shouted with laughter and pinched my arm to draw my attention and to testify his own delight; then he sat down in the midst of the ruins, while around us, squatting on the top of the walls, perching on every eminence, a number of animals with white whiskers put out their tongues and shook their fists at us.

"When he had seen enough of this, the yellow Rajah rose and began to walk along sedately, keeping me always at his side, happy at having shown me such things on the very day of my arrival, and reminding me that a grand tiger hunt was to take place the next day, in my honor.

"I was present, and also at a second, third, and at ten, twenty in succession. We hunted all the animals the country produces: the panther, the bear, elephant, antelope, the hippopotamus and the crocodile—and how many more I know not, half the animals in the world, I should say. I was disgusted at seeing so much blood flow and tired of this monotonous pleasure.

"At last the Prince's ardor abated and, at my urgent request, he left me a little leisure for work, and contented himself by loading me with costly presents. He sent me jewels, magnificent stuffs, and well-broken animals of all sorts, which Haribada presented to me with apparently as grave respect as if I had been the sun himself, although he heartily despised me at the bottom of his heart.

"Every day a procession of servants brought me in covered dishes, a portion of each course that was served at the royal table; every day the Rajah appeared to take extreme pleasure in devising some new entertainment for me—dances by the *bayadères,* jugglers, reviewers of the troops; and I was obliged to pretend to enjoy it all so as not to hurt his feelings when he wished to show me his wonderful country in all its charms and splendor.

"As soon as I was left alone for a few moments I either worked or went to see the monkeys, whose company pleased me much better than did that of their royal master.

"One evening, however, on coming back from a walk, I found Haribada outside the gate of my palace. He told me in mysterious tones that a gift from the Prince was waiting for me in my room, and he said that his master begged me to excuse him for not having sooner thought of offering me that of which I had been deprived for so long.

"After these obscure remarks the ambassador bowed and withdrew.

"When I went in I saw six little girls standing against the wall, motionless, side by side, like smelts on a skewer. The eldest was perhaps ten and the youngest eight years old. For the first moment I could not understand why this girls' school had taken up its abode in my rooms; then, however, I divined the Prince's delicate attention; he had made me a present of a harem, and had chosen very young members from an excess of generosity.

"For some time I remained confused and embarrassed, ashamed in the presence of these children, who looked at me with great grave eyes which seemed already to divine what I might want of them.

"I did not know what to say to them; I felt inclined to send them back; but one cannot return the presents of a prince; it would have been a mortal insult. I was obliged, therefore, to keep them, and to install this troop of children in my rooms.

"They stood motionless, looking at me, waiting for my orders, trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. Hang such a present! How dreadfully it was in my way! At last, thinking that I must look rather ridiculous, I asked the eldest her name.

" 'Châli,' she replied.

"This little creature, with her beautiful skin, which was slightly yellow, like old ivory, was a marvel, a perfect statue, with the somewhat long, severe lines of her face.

"I then asked, in order to see what she would

reply, and also, perhaps, to embarrass her a little:

"'What have you come here for?'

"She replied, in her soft, melodious voice:

"'I have come to be altogether at my lord's disposal, and to do whatever he wishes.'

"Evidently she was quite resigned.

"I put the same question to the youngest, who answered immediately in her shrill voice:

"'I am here to do whatever you command, my master.'

"This one was like a little mouse, and was very attractive, as they all were, so I took her in my arms and kissed her. The others made a movement to go away, thinking, no doubt, that I had made my choice; but I ordered them to stay, and sitting down in the Indian fashion, I made them all sit round me, and began to tell them fairy tales, for I spoke their language fairly well.

"They listened attentively, and trembled, wringing their hands in agony. Poor little things, they were not thinking any longer of the reason why they were sent to me.

"When I had finished my story, I called Latchman, my confidential servant, and made him bring sweetmeats and cakes, of which they ate enough to make themselves ill; then, as I began to find the adventure rather entertaining, I played games to amuse them.

"One of these diversions had a great success. I made a bridge of my legs, and the six children

ran underneath, the smallest beginning and the tallest always knocking against them a little, because she did not stoop enough. It made them shout with laughter, and these young voices sounding beneath the low vaults of my sumptuous palace seemed to wake it up and to people it with childlike gayety, filling it with life.

"Next I took great interest in seeing to the sleeping apartments of my innocent concubines, and at last saw them safely locked up under the surveillance of four female servants, whom the Prince had sent me at the same time in order to take care of my sultanas.

"For a week I took the greatest pleasure in playing papa toward these living dolls. We had capital games of hide-and-seek and puss-in-the-corner, which gave them the greatest pleasure, for every day I taught them a new game, to their intense delight.

"My house now resembled a school, and my little friends, dressed in beautiful silk stuffs and in materials embroidered with gold and silver, ran up and down the long galleries and the quiet rooms like little animals.

"At last, one evening, without my knowing exactly how it happened, the oldest of them, the one called Châli, who looked so like an ivory statue, became my sweetheart.

"She was an adorable little creature, timid and gentle, who soon loved me ardently, with some

degree of shame, with hesitation, as if afraid of European ideas, with reserve and scruples, and yet with passionate tenderness. I cherished her as if I had been her father.

"The others continued to play in the palace like a litter of happy kittens, and Châli never left me except when I went to the Prince.

"We passed delicious hours together in the ruins of the old castle, surrounded by the monkeys, who had become our friends.

"She used to sit on my knees, turning all sorts of things over in her little sphinx's head, or perhaps not thinking of anything, retaining the beautiful, charming, hereditary pose of that noble and dreamy people, the hieratic pose of the sacred statues.

"In a large brass dish I would bring provisions, cakes and fruits. The apes came nearer and nearer, followed by their young ones, who were more timid; at last they sat down round us in a circle, without daring to come any closer, waiting for me to distribute my delicacies. Then, almost invariably, a male more daring than the rest would come to me with outstretched hand, like a beggar, and I would give him something, which he would take to his wife. All the others immediately began to utter furious cries of rage and jealousy; and I could not make the terrible racket cease except by throwing each one a share.

"As I was very comfortable in the ruins, I had

my instruments brought there, so that I might be able to work. As soon, however, as they saw the copper fittings on my scientific instruments, the monkeys, no doubt taking them for some deadly engines, fled on all sides, uttering the most piercing shrieks.

"I often spent my evening also with Châli on one of the outer galleries that overlooked the lake of Vihara. Without speaking we looked at the bright moon gliding over the sky and throwing a mantle of trembling silver across the water, and far below, on the farther shore, the row of small pagodas like dainty mushrooms with their stalks in the water. Taking the thoughtful little head between my hands, I printed a long, soft kiss on Châli's polished brow, on her great eyes, which were full of the secret of that ancient land of mystery, and on her calm lips, which returned my caress. I felt a vague, though strongly poetic sensation, a sensation that in this girl I possessed a whole race, that mother race from which all the rest originated.

"The Prince continued to load me with presents. One day he sent me an object which excited a passionate admiration in Châli. It was merely one of those cardboard boxes covered with shells that can be bought at any European seaside resort for a trifling sum. But there it was, a jewel beyond price, as she thought, and no doubt was the first that had found its way into the kingdom. I put it on a table and left it there, wondering at the value which

was set upon this trumpery article out of a bazaar.

"But Châli never tired of looking at it, of admiring it ecstatically. From time to time she would say, 'May I touch it?' And when I gave her permission she raised the lid, closed it again with the greatest care, touched the shells very gently, the contact appearing to give her real physical pleasure.

"However, my work was now finished and it was time for me to return. I was a long time in making up my mind, detained by tenderness for my little friend, but at last I was obliged to fix the day of departure.

"The Prince arranged fresh hunting excursions and wrestling matches, but after a fortnight of these pleasures I declared that I could stay no longer, and he gave me my liberty.

"My farewell from Châli was heartrending. She wept a long time, with her head on my breast, her little frame shaken with sobs. I did not know how to console her; my kisses were useless.

"Suddenly an idea struck me; I took the shell box, and putting it into her hands, said: 'That is for you; it is yours.'

"Then I saw her smile brightly. Her face lighted with an inward joy, that profound joy that comes when apparently impossible dreams are suddenly realized, and she embraced me ardently.

"Still she wept bitterly when I bade her a last farewell.

"I gave paternal kisses and cakes to all the children, and then I departed.

II

"Two years had passed when my duties again called me to Bombay, and, because I knew the country and the language well, I was left there to undertake another mission.

"I finished what I had to do as quickly as possible, and as I had a considerable amount of spare time on my hands I determined to go and see my friend the King of Ganhard and my dear little Châli once more, though I expected to find her much changed.

"The Rajah received me with every demonstration of pleasure, and hardly left me for a moment during the first day of my visit. At night, however, when I was alone, I sent for Haribada, and after several irrelevant questions I inquired:

" 'Do you know what has become of little Châli, whom the Rajah gave to me?'

" 'He immediately assumed a sad and troubled look, and said, in evident embarrassment:

" 'We had better not speak of her.'

" 'Why? She was a dear little woman.'

" 'She turned out badly, Monsieur.'

" 'What—Châli? What has become of her? Where is she?'

" 'I meant to say that she came to a bad end.'

" 'A bad end! Is she dead?'

" 'Yes. She committed a very dreadful action.'

"I was very much distressed. I felt my heart

beat, and my breast was oppressed with grief, but I insisted on knowing what she had done and what had happened to her.

"The man became more and more embarrassed, and murmured: 'You had better not ask about it.'

" 'But I want to know.'

" 'She stole——'

" 'Who—Châli? What did she steal?'

" 'Something that belonged to you.'

" 'To me? What do you mean?'

" 'The day you left she stole that little box which the Prince had given you; it was found in her hands.'

" 'What box are you talking about?'

" 'The box covered with shells.'

" 'But I gave it to her.'

"The Indian looked at me with stupefaction, then replied: 'She declared with the most sacred oaths that you had given it to her, but nobody could believe that you could have given a king's present to a slave, and so the Rajah had her punished.'

" 'How was she punished? What was done to her?'

" 'She was tied up in a sack, and thrown into the lake from this window, from the window of the room in which we are, where she had committed the theft.'

"I felt the most profound grief that I ever experienced, and I made a sign to Haribada to go away, so that he might not see my tears; and I

spent the night on the gallery that overlooked the lake, on the gallery where I had so often held the poor child on my knees.

"I pictured to myself her pretty little body lying decomposed in a sack in the dark waters beneath me, those waters which we had so often looked at together.

"The next day I left again, in spite of the Rajah's entreaties and evident vexation; and I now still feel as if I had never loved anyone but Châli."

THE ODALISQUE

IN Senichou, about twenty years ago, a suburb of Prague, lived a poor, honest couple who earned their bread by the sweat of their face, the husband working in a large printing-office, while his wife employed her spare time as a laundress. Their pride, and their only delight, was their daughter, Viteska, a vigorous, voluptuous-looking, handsome girl of eighteen, whom they brought up well and carefully. She worked for a dressmaker, and was thus able to help her parents a little, and she made use of her leisure moments to improve her education, and especially her music. She was a general favorite in the neighborhood, and was looked upon as a model by the whole suburb.

When she went to town to her work the tall girl, with her magnificent head like that of an ancient Bohemian Amazon, with its wealth of black hair, and her dark, sparkling yet soft eyes, attracted the looks of passers-by, in spite of her shabby dress, more than did the graceful, well-dressed ladies of the aristocracy. Frequently some young, wealthy

idler would follow her home, and even try to get into conversation with her, but she always managed to get rid of them and their importunities, and did not require any escort, for she was quite capable of protecting herself.

One evening, however, on the suspension bridge, she met a man whose strange appearance made her glance at him with some interest, but perhaps with even more surprise. He was tall and handsome, with bright eyes and a black beard; he was very sunburned, and in his long coat, resembling a caftan, with a red fez on his head, he gave one the impression of an Oriental. He had noticed her glance all the more as he himself had been so struck by her poor yet regal appearance that he remained standing and looking at her as if he were devouring her with his eyes, so that Viteska, usually so fearless, cast down her eyes. She hurried on, and he followed her, and the quicker she walked the more rapidly he followed, and at last, when they were in a narrow, dark street in the suburb, he suddenly said, in an insinuating tone: "May I offer you my arm, my pretty girl?"

"You can see that I am old enough to look after myself," Viteska replied hastily; "I am much obliged to you, but must beg you not to follow me any more; I am known in this neighborhood, and it might injure my reputation."

"Oh, you are very much mistaken if you think you will get rid of me so easily," he replied. "I

have just come from the East and shall return there soon. Come with me, and as I believe that you are as sensible as you are beautiful you will certainly make your fortune there, and I will warrant that before the end of a year you will be covered with diamonds, and be waited on by eunuchs and female slaves."

"I am a respectable girl, sir," she replied proudly, and tried to go ahead of him, but the stranger was immediately at her side again.

"You were born to rule," he whispered to her. "Believe me, and I understand the matter, you will live to be a sultana if you have any luck."

Without answering, the girl walked on.

"But, at any rate, listen to me," the tempter continued.

"I will not listen to anything. Because I am poor you think it will be easy for you to tempt me," Viteska exclaimed; "but I am as virtuous as I am poor, and I should despise any position which I had to buy with my shame."

They had reached the little house where her parents lived, and she ran in quickly and slammed the door behind her.

When she went into town the next morning the stranger was waiting at the corner of the street where she lived, and bowed to her respectfully.

"Allow me to speak a few words to you," he began. "I feel that I ought to beg your pardon for my behavior yesterday."

"Please let me go on my way quietly," the girl replied. "What will the neighbors think of me?"

"I did not know you," he went on, without paying any attention to her angry looks, "but your extraordinary beauty attracted me. Now that I know that you are as good as you are charming I wish very much to become better acquainted with you. Believe me, I have the most honorable intentions."

Unfortunately, the bold stranger had taken the girl's fancy, and she could not find it in her heart to refuse him.

"If you are really in earnest," she stammered, in charming confusion, "do not follow me about in the public streets, but come to my parents' house like a man of honor, and state your intentions there."

"I will certainly do so, and immediately, if you like," the stranger replied eagerly.

"No, no," Viteska said; "but come this evening, if you wish."

The stranger bowed and left her. Calling on her parents the same evening, he introduced himself as Ireneus Krisapolis, a merchant of Smyrna, spoke of his brilliant circumstances, and finally declared that he loved Viteska passionately.

"That is all very well," the cautious father replied, "but what will it all lead to? Under no circumstances can I allow you to visit my daughter. Such a passion as yours often dies out as

quickly as it rises, and a respectable girl is easily robbed of her virtue."

"And suppose I make up my mind to marry your daughter?" the stranger asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"Then I shall refer you to my child, for I shall never force Viteska to marry against her will," her father said.

The stranger seized the pretty girl's hand, and spoke in glowing terms of his love for her, of the luxury with which she would be surrounded in his house, of the wonders of the East, to which he hoped to take her, and at last Viteska consented to become his wife. Thereupon the stranger hurried on the arrangements for the wedding in a manner that made the most favorable impression on them all, and during the time before their marriage he was frequently at her feet like her humble slave.

As soon as they were married they set off on their journey to Smyrna, and promised to write as soon as they got there. But a month, then two and three, passed without the parents receiving a line from them, and as their anxiety increased every day the father, in terror, finally applied to the police.

The first thing was to write to the Consul at Smyrna for information. His reply was to the effect that no merchant of the name of Ireneus Krisapolis was known in Smyrna, and that he never had been there. The police, at the entreaties of the frantic parents, continued their investigations,

but for a long time without result. At last they obtained a little light on the subject, but it was not at all satisfactory. The police at Pesth said that a short time before a man whose personal appearance exactly agreed with the description of Viteska's husband had carried off two girls from the Hungarian capital to Turkey, evidently intending to trade in that coveted, valuable commodity there; but that when he learned that the authorities were on his track he had escaped from justice by sudden flight.

Four years after Viteska's mysterious disappearance, two persons, a man and a woman, met in a narrow street in Damascus just as the Greek merchant had met Viteska on the suspension bridge at Prague. The man with the black beard, the red fez, and the long green caftan was no other than Ireneus Krisapolis. Matters appeared to be going well with him. He had his hands comfortably thrust into the red shawl that he wore around his waist, and a negro was walking behind him with a large parasol, while another carried his *chiboque*. A noble Turkish lady in a litter borne by four slaves met him; her face was covered with a white veil, all except a pair of large dark eyes that flashed threateningly at the merchant.

He smiled, for he thought he had found favor in the eyes of an Eastern houri, and that flattered him; but soon he lost sight of her in the crowd, and he forgot her almost immediately. The next morn-

ing, however, to his astonishment, a eunuch of the Pasha's called on him, and told him to come with him. He took him to the Sultan's most powerful deputy, who ruled as an absolute despot in Damascus. They went through dark, narrow passages, and curtains were pushed aside which rustled as they closed behind him. At last they reached a large rotunda in the center of which was a beautiful fountain, and scarlet divans were placed all round it. Here the eunuch told the merchant to wait, and left him. He was puzzling his brains to know what the meaning of it all could be, when suddenly a tall, commanding woman came into the apartment. Again a pair of large, threatening eyes looked at him through the veil, and he knew from her green, gold-embroidered caftan that if it was not the Pasha's wife it was at least one of his favorites who was before him. He hurriedly knelt down, and, crossing his hands on his breast, put his forehead to the ground before her. But a clear, mocking laugh made him look up, and when the beautiful odalisque threw back her veil he uttered a cry of terror, for his wife, his deceived wife, whom he had sold, was standing before him.

"Do you know me?" she asked, with quiet dignity.

"Viteska!"

"Yes, that was my name when I was your wife," she replied quickly, in a contemptuous voice; "but now that I am the Pasha's wife my name is Sarema.

I do not suppose you ever expected to find me again, you wretch, when you sold me in Varna to an old Jewish profligate who was only half alive. You see I have got into better hands, and I have made my fortune, as you said I should do. Well? What do you expect; what thanks, what reward?"

The wretched man was lying, overwhelmed with confusion, at the feet of the woman whom he had so shamefully deceived, and could not find a word to say; he felt that he was lost, and had not even the courage to beg for mercy.

"You deserve death, you miscreant," Sarema continued. "You are in my hands and I can do whatever I please with you, for the Pasha has left your punishment to me alone. I ought to have you impaled, and to feast my eyes on your death agonies. That would be the smallest compensation for all the years of degradation that I have been through, and which I owe to you."

The wretched man cried, trembling all over and raising his hands to her in supplication: "Mercy, Viteska! Mercy!"

The odalisque's only reply was a laugh in which rang all the cruelty of an insulted woman's deceived heart. It seemed to give her pleasure to see the man whom she had loved and who had so shamefully trafficked in her beauty, in his abasement as he cringed before her, whining for his life as he clung to her knees; but at last she seemed to relent somewhat.

"I will give you your life, you miserable wretch," she said, "but you shall not go unpunished." So saying, she clapped her hands, and four black eunuchs came in and seized the favorite's unfortunate husband, and in a moment bound his hands and feet.

"I have changed my mind, and he shall not be put to death," Sarema said, with a smile that made the traitor's blood run cold in his veins; "but give him a hundred blows with the bastinado, and I will stand by and count them."

"For God's sake!" the merchant screamed, "I never can endure it."

"We will see about that," the favorite said coldly, "and if you die under it, it is allotted you by fate; I am not going to retract my orders."

She threw herself down on the cushions and began to smoke a long pipe which a female slave handed to her on her knees. At a sign from her the eunuchs tied the wretched man's feet to the pole by which the soles of the culprit were raised, and began the terrible punishment. At the tenth blow the merchant began to roar like a wild animal, but his wife remained unmoved. Carelessly blowing blue wreaths of smoke into the air, and, resting on her lovely arm, she watched his features, distorted by pain, with merciless enjoyment.

During the last blows he only groaned feebly, and then fainted.

A year later the dealer was caught with his fe-

male merchandise by the police in an Austrian town and handed over to justice, when he made a full confession, and by that means the parents of the Odalisque of Senichou heard of their daughter's position. As they knew that she was happy and surrounded by luxury, they made no attempt to get her out of the hands of the Pasha, who, like a thorough Mussulman, had become the slave of his slave.

The unfortunate husband was sent across the frontier when he was released from prison. His shameful traffic, however, flourishes still in spite of all the precautions of the police and of the consuls, and every year he provides the harems of the East with those voluptuous *Boxclanas,* especially from Bohemia and Hungary, who, in the eyes of a Mussulman, vie for the prize of beauty with the slender Circassian women.

THE WICKED MOHAMMED

"SHALL we take our coffee up on the roof?" asked my friend Captain Marret.

"Very willingly," I answered.

He arose. It was already dark in tne room, which was lighted only by an interior courtyard, after the fashion of Moorish houses. In front of the high, arched windows, lianas fell to the broad terrace, where we spent the warm summer evenings. Only the fruit remained on the table, enormous African fruits, grapes as large as plums, soft, purple-skinned figs, yellow pears, long, plump bananas, and Tougourt dates in a basket of alfalfa grass.

The dark-skinned man who was serving us opened the door, and I ascended the azure-walled stairway, which received from above the soft light of the dying day.

When I had arrived on the terrace I heaved a deep sigh of well-being. This charming spot overlooked the harbor and the distant shores.

The house the Captain had bought was an old

Arab dwelling, situated in the heart of that ancient city, in the midst of those winding alleys where swarms the strange population of the African coast.

Below us the square, flat roofs descended like giant steps to the oblique roofs of the European part of the city. Behind these one could see the masts of the vessels riding at anchor, then the sea, the calm, blue, broad sea under the calm, blue sky.

We reclined on some matting, our heads supported by cushions, and, while slowly drinking the savory coffee of that land, I watched the first stars twinkling in the darkening sky. One could barely see them, so far away were they.

A light, warm breeze caressed us. From time to time, heavier, warmer gusts, in which one could discern a vague odor, the odor of Africa, which seemed to be a breath of the desert from across the mountain ranges, would pass over us. The Captain, lying on his back, exclaimed:

"What a country, my friend! How sweet life is here! What a peculiar charm repose has here! These nights are made for dreams!"

I was still watching the stars appear, with an idle yet lively curiosity, with a dreamy delight.

"You might tell me something of your life in the South," I murmured.

Captain Marret was one of the oldest officers in the African service, who had arrived at his position by fighting his way there.

Thanks to him and to his extensive connections,

I had been able to undertake a wonderful trip into the desert; and I had come that evening to thank him, before returning to France.

"What kind of story do you wish?" he asked. "I have had so many adventures during my twelve years in the sand that I can remember hardly any of them."

"Tell me something about the Arabian women," I said.

He did not answer. He lay stretched out on the matting, his arms folded and his hands under his head, and from time to time I noticed the faint perfume of his cigar, whose smoke went straight up toward the sky in the calm evening air.

Suddenly he began to laugh.

"Oh, yes! I'll tell you about an odd thing that occurred in the beginning of my stay in Algeria.

"At that time we had in the African division extraordinary types, such as we no longer see and such as are no longer in existence; types that would have interested you enough to make you spend your whole life in this country.

"I was a simple spahi then, a little twenty-two-year-old spahi, blond, plucky, limber, and vigorous, a regular Algerian soldier, my friend. I was assigned to the military detachment at Boghar. You know Boghar, which is called the balcony of the South; from the top of the fort you beheld that country of fire, brown, bare, harassed, and stony. That is the real vestibule of the desert, the scorch-

ing yet wonderful frontier of the yellow desolation.

"At Boghar were about forty spahis, a good company of happy ones, besides a squad of African riflemen, and we learned that the tribe Ouled-Berghi had murdered an English traveler who had come to this country, no one knows how, for the English seem to be possessed by the devil.

"Justice had to be meted out for this crime against a European, but the commanding officer hesitated to send out a column, thinking that an Englishman was not really worth so much trouble.

"As he was talking the matter over with the Captain and the Lieutenant, a sergeant of the spahis, who was waiting to report, suddenly proposed to thrash the whole tribe if they would only give him six men.

"You know that in the South there is much more freedom than in the city garrisons, and between soldier and officer exists a certain friendship which one finds nowhere else.

"The Captain began to laugh: 'You, my man?'

" 'Yes, Captain, and if you wish I will bring the whole tribe back, prisoners.'

"The commanding officer, who was a whimsical sort of being, took him at his word.

" 'You will leave to-morrow morning, with six men of your own picking, and if you don't fulfil your promise, take care of yourself!'

"The sergeant smiled. 'Fear nothing, sir. My prisoners shall be here Wednesday noon.'

"This sergeant, the wicked Mohammed, as he was called, was really a remarkable man; he was a Turk, a real Turk, who had entered the service of France after a varied and doubtless checkered life. He had traveled through many lands: Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and he must have left his mark in many of these places. He was a regular *bashi-bazouk,* hardy, a reveler, fierce and gay, with a calm Oriental gayety. He was fat, very fat, but as nimble as a monkey, and he was a superb horseman. His moustache, incredibly thick and long, invariably brought to my mind a confused image of crescents and of scimitars. He hated the Arabs with an inexorable fierceness, and he treated them with a terrible, sly cruelty, continually inventing new tricks, fearful and well-calculated acts of perfidy.

"Besides all this, he possessed marvelous physical strength and had wonderful audacity.

" 'Choose your men, my boy.'

"Mohammed took me. He had confidence in me, and I remained devoted to him, body and soul, for this choice, which pleased me as much then as the cross of honor pleased me later.

"The following morning at dawn we left, just seven of us. My comrades were all of those bandits and pirates who, having marauded and prowled around in every possible land, end by enlisting in some foreign legion. Our African division was full of these blackguards, who were excellent soldiers but not overscrupulous.

"Mohammed had given to each of us ten pieces of rope, each about a yard long. Being the youngest and the lightest, I received, in addition, a long rope, a hundred yards long. When he was asked what he expected to do with all this rope, he answered with his cunning, calm expression:

" 'We'll use that for Arab fishing.'

"And he slyly winked his eye, a trick he had learned from an old African rifleman, who came from Paris.

"He rode at the head of our troop, wearing a red turban which he always wore in action, and smiling through his big moustache.

"This enormous Turk was really magnificent, with his powerful chest, his great shoulders, and his quiet gaze. He rode a white horse, of medium size but sturdy; and the rider seemed much too heavy for his mount.

"He had entered a rocky little dell, bare, yellow, which extends to the valley of Chelif, and we were talking about our expedition. My companions had every imaginable accent, for among them were one Spaniard, two Greeks, one American, and three Frenchmen. As for Mohammed, he talked in a manner truly marvelous.

"The sun—the terrible southern sun, which is not known on the other side of the Mediterranean—was beating down on our shoulders, and we were advancing slowly, as one always does over there. We traveled all day without seeing either tree or Arab.

"At about one o'clock in the afternoon, near a little spring which trickled through the rocks, we had eaten the bread and dried mutton we had taken with us; then, after about twenty minutes' rest, we went on again.

"Toward six o'clock in the evening, after making a long turn out of the way, according to the orders of our leader, we discovered a tribe encamped behind a small hill. The low, brown tents made dark spots against the yellow earth, looking like huge desert mushrooms growing at the foot of this red, sun-burned hillock.

"They were the men we were looking for. Their horses were grazing a little farther away, at the edge of a field of dark-green alfalfa grass.

"Mohammed gave the order: 'Gallop!' and we rushed into the middle of the camp like a hurricane. The women, wild with fright, covered with white rags which hung and floated around them, quickly ran for their tents, crawling, wriggling, and shrieking like hunted animals. The men, on the other hand, rushed out from all sides, ready to defend themselves.

"We went straight for the largest tent, that of the agha.

"We kept our swords sheathed, following the example of Mohammed, who was galloping in a peculiar manner. He sat perfectly straight, absolutely motionless on his little horse, which was straining furiously under this ponderous mass. The calmness

of the horseman with the long moustache contrasted strangely with the vivacity of the animal.

"The native chief came out of his tent just as we arrived before it. He was a tall, thin, dark man, with piercing eyes, a high forehead, and arched eyebrows.

" 'What do you wish?' he cried in Arabic.

"Mohammed, stopping his horse short, answered the man in his own language:

" 'Is it you that killed the English traveler?'

" 'I have no reason for answering your question,' the agha answered in a clear voice.

"Around us a storm was brewing. The Arabs were assembling on all sides, crowding around us and shouting at us.

"They looked like fierce birds of prey, with their large hooked noses, their thin faces with high cheek-bones, their loose garments fluttering in the wind.

"Mohammed, with his turban on one side of his head, was smiling; his eyes sparkled, one could almost see little thrills of pleasure on his plump, wrinkled cheeks.

"He continued in a thundering voice, which drowned the rising clamor:

" 'Death to him who has given death!'

"He pointed his revolver toward the brown face of the agha. I saw a little smoke issue from the barrel; then a little froth of pink brains and blood spurted from the chief's forehead. He fell on his back like a log, opening his arms, which spread out

the floating folds of his burnous like giant wings.

"I certainly thought that my last day had come, so great was the tumult around us.

"Mohammed had drawn his sword. We followed his example. Swinging the weapon around him in a circle, he cried:

" 'Life to those who surrender! Death to the others!'

"Seizing in his herculean grip the man nearest him, he flattened him out on his saddle and tied his hands, crying to us:

" 'Do as I do, and kill all who resist.'

"In five minutes we had captured about twenty Arabs, whose arms we bound firmly. Then we chased the fugitives; for it had been a complete rout as soon as they had seen our drawn swords. We brought back about thirty more men.

"Over the whole plain we could see white specks running around. The women were dragging their children and shrieking in shrill voices. Yellow dogs, like jackals, circled around us, barking and showing their white fangs.

"Mohammed, who seemed wild with joy, sprang from his horse and seized the rope that I had brought.

" 'Come on now, my men,' he said. 'Two of you dismount!'

"Then he did a terrible yet comical thing: he made a string of prisoners, tied so that they were practically hanged. He had tied the fists of the

first captive firmly, then he made a slip-knot which he passed around his neck, and with the same rope he tied the arms of the following man and passed the rope around his neck. Our fifty prisoners soon found themselves so tied that the slightest movement of one of them toward escape would have strangled him as well as his two neighbors.

"Every motion they made tightened the knots around their necks, and they had to walk in step and at even distances, otherwise they would choke like rats in a trap.

"When this strange business was finished, Mohammed began to laugh with his silent laugh which shook his whole body although no noise issued from his mouth.

" 'That's the Arabian chain,' he said.

"We ourselves began to be convulsed with laughter at the surprised and pitiful expressions of our prisoners.

" 'Now, children,' cried our leader, 'drive a stake in at each end and we'll tie up the bunch.'

"A stake was driven at each end of this white string of captives, looking like ghosts, who stood motionless, as if they had been changed to stone.

" 'Now, we will have dinner!' said the Turk.

"A fire was kindled and we roasted a lamb, which we carved with our hands. Then we ate some dates we had found in the tents; we drank milk obtained in the same manner, and we managed to pick up a few silver trinkets forgotten by the fugitives.

"We were just quietly finishing our meal when I noticed, on the opposite hill, a strange-looking crowd. It was the women who had run away a short time before, nothing but women. They were running toward us. I pointed them out to the wicked Mohammed.

"He smiled.

" 'That is the dessert!' he said.

"Ah! Yes, the dessert!

"They came, galloping wildly, and soon we received a shower of stones which they threw without stopping their horses. As they passed we saw that they were armed with knives, tent stakes, and old kitchen utensils.

" 'Mount!' cried Mohammed. It was high time. The attack was terrible. They had come to free the prisoners and were trying to cut the rope. The Turk, seeing the danger, became furious and yelled: 'Kill them! Kill them!' As we remained motionless, undecided before this new kind of attack, hesitating to kill women, he rushed forward, against the approaching troop.

"Alone, he charged this brigade of ragged women and the rascal began to slash around him like a madman, with such rage, such fury that one could see a white body fall each time his arm fell.

"He was so fierce that the women, terrified, escaped as quickly as they had come, leaving behind them a dozen dead and wounded whose blood stained their white garments.

"Mohammed, his features convulsed, returned to us, saying:

" 'Come on, my lads; we had better get out of here; they will come back.'

"We retreated slowly, leaving our prisoners paralyzed by the fear of strangulation.

"The following day, as noon was ringing, we arrived at Boghar with our human chain. Only six had died on the way, but we had often been forced to loosen the knots from one end of the line to the other, for a single jolt would strangle a dozen captives."

The Captain was silent. I made no comment. I was marveling of the strange country where such things could be seen; and I gazed silently at the myriads of twinkling stars in the black sky.

MARROCA

SO, my friend, you would like to have me give you my impressions of Africa, to tell you my adventures and, especially, my love-affairs in this country which has long had so strong an attraction for me. You were amused in anticipation at my dusky sweethearts, as you called them, and said you could see me returning to France followed by a tall ebony-hued female wearing a yellow silk bandanna round her head and voluminous gaudy trousers.

No doubt the Moorish women will play a part in my story, for I have seen several of them who have made me feel very much inclined to fall in love with them; but by way of a beginning, I encountered something better, and quite original.

In your last letter to me you say: "When I know how people love in a country I know that country well enough to describe it, although I may never have seen it." Let me tell you, then, that here they love furiously. From the very first moment one feels a sort of trembling ardor, of continual desire,

to the very tips of the fingers, which overexcites our amorous feelings, and all our faculties of physical sensation, from the simple contact of the hands, and makes us commit many follies.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not know whether what you call love of the heart, love of the soul, whether sentimental idealism, Platonic love, in a word, does exist on earth; I doubt it myself. But that other love, the sensual love, which really has a great deal of good about it, is actually terrible in this climate. The heat, the burning atmosphere which makes you feverish, those suffocating blasts of wind from the South, those waves of fire that come from the desert which is so near us, that oppressive sirocco, more destructive and withering than fire, that perpetual conflagration of an entire continent, which is burned even to its stones by a fierce and devouring sun—all these things inflame the blood, excite the flesh, and make brutes of us.

But to come to my story. I shall not tell you about the beginning of my travels in Africa. After going to Bona, Constantine, Biskara and Sétif, I went to Bougie through the defiles of Chabet, by an excellent road through a large forest, which follows the sea at a height of six hundred feet above it, as far as that wonderful bay of Bougie, which is as beautiful as that of Naples, of Ajaccio, or of Douarnenez, and these are the loveliest that I know.

Far away in the distance, before one enters the large inlet where the water is perfectly calm, one

sees Bougie. It is built on the steep sides of a high hill covered with trees, and forms a white spot on that green slope; it might almost be taken for the foam of a cascade falling into the sea.

I had no sooner set foot in that delightful small town than I knew that I should stay there a long time. In all directions the eye rests on rugged, strangely shaped hilltops, which are so close together that one can hardly see the open sea, so that the gulf looks like a lake. The blue water is wonderfully transparent, and the azure sky—a deep azure, as if it had received two coats of paint—expands its wonderful beauty about it. They seem to be a reflection of each other, as in a mirror.

Bougie is a town of ruins, and on the quay, as one approaches, one sees a ruin so magnificent that it reminds one of a scene at the opera. It is the old Saracen Gate, overgrown with ivy; and there are ruins in all directions on the hills round the town, fragments of Roman walls, bits of Saracen monuments, the remains of Arab dwellings.

I took a small Moorish house in the upper town. You know those dwellings, which have been described so often. They have no windows in the outer wall; but they are lighted from top to bottom by an inner court. On the first floor there is a large, cool room, in which one passes the day, and a terrace on the roof, on which one spends the night.

At once I assumed the custom of all hot countries—that is, I took a siesta after luncheon. That

is the hottest time in Africa, the time when one can hardly breathe; when the streets, the fields, and the long, dazzling white roads are deserted, when everyone is asleep, or, at any rate, trying to sleep, attired as scantily as possible.

In my drawing-room, which had columns of Arabian architecture, I had placed a large, soft couch, covered with a carpet from Djebel Amour, and I lay down, very nearly in the costume of Assan, but I could not sleep. There are two forms of torture on the earth which I hope you never will know, the thirst for water and the longing for a woman's society, and I do not know which is worse. In the desert men would commit any infamy for the sake of a glass of clean, cold water, and what would one not give in some of the towns of the littoral to meet a handsome, healthy girl! There is no lack of girls in Africa; on the contrary, they abound, but—to continue my comparison—they are as unwholesome as the muddy water in the wells of Sahara.

One day when I was feeling more enervated than usual, I was trying in vain to close my eyes. My legs twitched as if they were being pricked, and I tossed about uneasily on my couch, until at last, unable to bear it any longer, I got up and went out. It was a terribly hot day, in the middle of July, and the pavement was hot enough to bake bread upon it. My shirt, which was wet with perspiration, clung to my body, and on the horizon there was a

slight white vapor, which seemed to be palpable heat.

I went down to the beach and walked along the shore of the pretty bay where the baths are. Nobody was about, and nothing was stirring; not a sound of bird or of beast was to be heard; the very waves were silent, and the sea appeared to be sleeping in the sun.

Suddenly, behind one of the rocks which were half covered by the silent water, I heard a slight movement, and on turning round, I saw a nude girl taking a bath in the water which covered her to the breast; no doubt she reckoned on being alone at that hot period of the day. Her face was turned toward the sea, and she was moving gently up and down without perceiving me.

Nothing could have surprised me more than the sight of that beautiful woman in the water, which was as clear as crystal, under a blaze of sunlight. She was marvelously beautiful, tall, and modeled like a statue. She turned round, uttered a cry, and half swimming, half walking, hid herself completely behind her rock; but as she must necessarily come out sometime, I sat down on the beach and waited. Presently she just showed her head, which was covered with thick black braids. She had a rather large mouth, with full lips, large, bold eyes, and her skin, which was somewhat tanned by the climate, looked like hard, polished ivory.

She called out to me: "Go away!" and her full

voice, which corresponded to her strong build, had a guttural accent. As I did not move, she added: "It is not right of you to stay there, Monsieur." I did not move, however, and her head disappeared. Ten minutes passed, and then, first her hair, then her forehead, and then her eyes reappeared; but slowly and cautiously, as if she were playing at hide-and-seek and were looking to see who was near. This time she was furious, and called out: "You will cause me to have some illness, for I shall not come out as long as you are there." Thereupon, I arose and walked away, but not without looking around several times. When she thought I was far enough away, she came out of the water, bending down and turning her back to me, and disappeared in a cavity in the rock, behind a skirt that was hanging up in front of it.

I returned there the next day. She was bathing again, but had on a bathing costume, and she began to laugh, and showed her white teeth. A week later we were friends, and in another week we were ardent lovers. Her name was Marroca, and she pronounced it as if there were a dozen *r's* in it. She was the daughter of Spanish colonists, and had married a Frenchman, whose name was Pontabèze. He was in the government employ, though I never exactly knew what his occupation was. I found out that he was always very busy, and I did not care for anything else.

She then changed the hour for taking her bath,

and came to my house every day to take a siesta there. What a siesta! It could hardly be called reposing! She was a splendid girl, of a somewhat animal but superb type. Her eyes were always glowing with passion; her half-opened lips, her sharp teeth, and even her smiles, had something ferociously loving about them; and her whole body had something of the animal and made her a sort of inferior and magnificent being, a creature who was destined for passionate love, and reminded me of those ancient deities who gave expression to their instincts in the most primitive manner.

Her mind was as simple as two and two are four, and a sonorous laugh served her instead of thought.

Instinctively proud of her beauty, she did not hesitate to display it with daring and unconscious immodesty.

Sometimes she came in the evening, when her husband was on duty somewhere, and we would lie on the terrace. When the full moon illumined the town and the gulf, with its surrounding frame of hills, we saw lying on all the other terraces what looked like an army of silent phantoms, who would occasionally get up, change their places, and lie down again, in the languorous warmth of the starry sky.

One night, when I was sleeping under the starry sky, she came and knelt on my carpet, and putting her lips, which curled slightly, close to my face, she

said: "You must come soon and stay at my house."

I did not understand her, and asked: "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when my husband has gone away, you must come and stay with me."

I could not help laughing, and said: "Why, if you come here?" She went on, almost talking into my mouth, "I want it as a remembrance." Still I did not grasp her meaning. She put her arms round my neck. "When you are no longer here I shall think of it."

I was touched and amused at the same time, and said: "You must be mad. I would much rather remain here. Is your husband very unkind to you?" I continued.

She looked vexed, and said: "Oh, no! He is very kind."

"But you are not fond of him?"

She looked at me with astonishment in her large eyes. "Indeed, I am very fond of him, very; but not so much so as I am of you."

I could not understand it at all, and while I was trying to grasp her meaning, she pressed one of those kisses, whose power she knew so well, on my lips, and said: "But you will come, will you not?"

I resisted, however, and so she rose immediately, and went away; nor did she come back for a week. On the eighth day she returned, stopped gravely at the door of my room, and said: "Are you coming to my house to-night? If you refuse, I shall go away."

Eight days is a very long time, my friend, and in Africa those eight days are as good as a month. "Yes," I said, and opened my arms, and she threw herself into them.

At night she waited for me in a neighboring street, and took me to their house, which was very small, and near the harbor. First we went through the kitchen, where they had their meals, and then into a very neat whitewashed room, with photographs on the walls and paper flowers under a glass case. Marroca seemed beside herself with pleasure, and she danced about, saying: "There, you are at home now." And I certainly acted as if I were, though I felt rather embarrassed and somewhat uneasy.

Suddenly a loud knocking at the door made us start, and a man's voice called out: "Marroca, it is I."

She started. "My husband! Here, hide under the bed quickly."

I looked distractedly for my coat, but she gave me a push, and gasped: "Come along, come quickly."

I lay down flat on my stomach, and crept under the bed without a word, while she went into the kitchen. I heard her open a closet door, and then shut it again, and she came back into the room, carrying some object which I could not see, but which she quickly put down; and as her husband was getting impatient, she said, calmly: "I cannot find the

matches." Suddenly she added: "Oh! Here they are; I will come and let you in."

The man entered, and I could see nothing of him but his feet, which were enormous. If the rest of him was in proportion, he must have been a giant.

I heard kisses, a little pat on her bare back, and a laugh, and he said, in strong Marseilles accent: "I forgot my purse, so I was obliged to come back; you were sound asleep, I suppose." He went to the cupboard, and was a long time in finding what he wanted; and as Marroca had thrown herself on the bed as if she were weary, he went up to her, and no doubt tried to caress her, for she flung a volley of angry *r's* at him. His feet were so close to me that I felt a stupid, inexplicable longing to catch hold of them, but I restrained myself, and when he saw that she would have nothing to say to him, he grew angry, and said: "You are not at all nice to-night. Good-by." I heard another kiss, then the big feet turned, and I saw the nails in the soles of his shoes as he went into the next room. The front door closed, and I was saved!

I came slowly out of my retreat, feeling rather humiliated, and while Marroca danced a jig round me, shouting with laughter and clapping her hands, I threw myself heavily into a chair. But I jumped up with a bound, for I had sat down on something cold, and as I was not fully dressed, the contact made me start, and I looked round. I had sat down on a small ax, used for cutting wood and as sharp

as a knife. How had it got there? I certainly had not seen it when I went in; but Marroca, seeing me jump up, nearly choked with laughter, and coughed with both hands to her sides.

I thought her merriment rather out of place; we had risked our lives stupidly, and I still felt a cold shiver down my back, and I was rather hurt at her foolish laughter.

"Suppose your husband had seen me?" I said.

"There was no danger of that," she replied.

"What do you mean—no danger? That is a good joke! If he had stooped down, he must have seen me."

She did not laugh any more, she only looked at me with her large eyes, which were bright with merriment. "He would not have stooped."

"Why?" I persisted. "Just suppose that he had let his hat fall, he would have been sure to pick it up, and then—I was well prepared to defend my position, in this costume!"

Marroca put her two strong, round arms about my neck, and, lowering her voice, as she did when she said "I *ador-re* you," she whispered, "Then he would *never-r* have got up again."

I did not understand her, and said: "What do you mean?"

She gave me a sly wink, and put out her hand to the chair on which I had sat, and her outstretched hands, her smile, her half-open lips, her white, sharp, ferocious teeth, all drew my attention to the

little ax which was used for cutting wood, whose sharp blade was glistening in the candle-light; and while she put out her hand as if she were about to take it, she put her left arm around me, and drawing me to her, and laying her lips against mine, with her right arm she made a motion as if she were cutting off the head of a kneeling man!

This, my friend, is the manner in which people here understand conjugal duties, love, and hospitality!

ALLOUMA

I

SHOULD you ever happen to be in the vicinity of Bordj-Ebbaba while you are in Algeria, be sure to visit my old friend Auballe, who has settled there," said one of my friends.

I had forgotten the name of Auballe and of Ebbaba, and was not thinking of the settler, when I arrived at his house by a mere accident. For a month I had been wandering on foot through that magnificent district which extends from Algiers to Cherchell, Orléansville and Tiaret. It is at the same time wooded and bare, grand and charming. Between two hills one comes across vast pine forests, in narrow valleys, through which torrents rush in the winter. Enormous trees, which have fallen across the ravine, serve as a bridge for the Arabs and also for the tropical creepers, which twine round the dead stems and adorn them with new life. There are hollows in little-known recesses of the mountains, of an awe-inspiring beauty, and level banks of streams, which are covered with oleanders and are indescribably lovely.

The most pleasant recollections of that excursion however, are the long after-dinner walks along the wooded roads, on those coast hills from which one can see an immense expanse of country from the blue sea as far as the chain of the Ouarsenis, on the summit of which is the cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad.

I lost my way that day. I had just climbed to the top of a hill, whence, beyond a long extent of rising ground, I could see the extensive plain of Metidja, and then, on the summit of another chain, almost invisible in the distance, that strange monument called *The Tomb of the Christian Woman,* which is said to be the burial-place of a royal family of Mauritania. I went down again, going southward, with a yellow landscape before me, extending as far as the fringe of the desert, as yellow as if the hills were covered with lions' skins sewn together. Sometimes a pointed yellow peak would rise from the midst of them, like the hairy back of a camel.

I walked quickly and lightly, as one does when following tortuous paths on a mountain slope. Nothing seems to weigh on one in those short, swift walks through the invigorating air of those heights, neither the body, nor the heart, nor the thoughts, nor even cares. On that day I felt nothing of all that crushes and tortures life; I felt only the pleasure of that descent. In the distance I saw an Arab encampment, brown pointed tents, which

seemed rooted to the earth as limpets are to a rock. White figures, men and women, were walking slowly about, and the bells of the flocks sounded indistinctly through the evening air.

The trees along the road hung down under the weight of their purple fruit, which was falling on the ground. They looked like martyred trees, from which blood-colored sweat was falling, for at the tip of every stem was a red berry, like a drop of blood.

The earth all around was covered with a shower of this fruit and as my feet crushed them, they left blood-colored tracks. Sometimes as I went along, I would gather some berries and eat them.

The valleys by this time were filled with a white mist, which rose slowly, like steam from the flanks of an ox; and behind the chain of mountains that bordered the horizon, on the outskirts of the desert of Sahara, the sky was aflame. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood—blood again! Blood and gold, the whole of human history—and sometimes between the two there was a small opening in the greenish azure, far away like a dream.

How far away I was from those persons and things with which one occupies oneself on the boulevards, far from myself, too, for I had become a kind of wandering being, without thought or consciousness, far from my road, of which I was not even thinking, for as night came on, I found that I had lost my way.

The shades of night were falling on the earth like a shower of blackness, and I saw nothing before me but the mountain in the far distance. Presently I distinguished some tents in the valley into which I descended, and tried to make the first Arab I met understand in which direction I desired to go. I do not know whether he understood me, but he gave me a long answer, which I did not understand. In despair I was about to make up my mind to pass the night wrapped in a rug near the encampment, when among the strange words that he uttered, I fancied that I heard the name *Bordj-Ebbaba,* and so I repeated:

"*Bordj-Ebbaba*?" "Yes, yes."

I showed him two francs, which were a fortune to him and he set off while I followed him. I followed that pale phantom, which strode on before me barefooted, along stony paths on which I stumbled continually, for a long time; suddenly I saw a light, and we presently reached the door of a white house, a kind of fortress with plain walls lacking outside windows. When I knocked, dogs began to bark inside, and a voice asked in French:

"Who is there?"

"Does Monsieur Auballe live here?" I asked.

"Yes."

The door was opened for me, and I found myself face-to-face with Monsieur Auballe himself, a tall man in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth and the appearance of a jolly Hercules.

As soon as I mentioned my name, he put out both his hands and said:

"Consider yourself at home here, Monsieur."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining ravenously opposite to my host, who went on smoking.

I knew his history. After wasting a great amount of money on women, he had invested the remnants of his fortune in Algerian landed property and taken to money-making. It turned out prosperously; he was happy and had the calm look of a contented man. I could not understand how this reckless Parisian could have grown accustomed to that horrible life in such a lonely spot, and I asked him about it.

"How long have you lived here?" I asked.

"Nine years."

"And have you not been intolerably dull and miserable?"

"No, one gets used to this country, and ends by liking it. You cannot imagine what a hold it has on people through those small animal instincts of which we ourselves are unaware. We first become attached to it through our external senses, to which it affords secret gratifications that we do not inquire into. The air and the climate overcome our flesh, in spite of ourselves, and the bright light with which it is inundated keeps the mind clear and fresh at but little cost. It penetrates our being continually through our eyes, and one might really say that it purifies the somber nooks of the soul."

"And how about the society of women?"

"Ah! There is rather a dearth of them!"

"Only *rather?*"

"Well, yes—rather. For one can always, even among the Arabs, find some complaisant native women, who think of the nights of Roumi."

He turned to the Arab, who was waiting on me, a tall, dark fellow, with bright black eyes flashing beneath his turban, and said to him:

"I will call you when I want you, Mohammed." Then turning to me, he said:

"He understands French, and I am about to tell you a story in which he plays a leading part."

As soon as the man had left the room, he began:

"I had been here about four years, and hardly felt quite settled yet in this country, whose language I was beginning to speak.

"I had bought this farm, this *bordj,* which had been a military post, and was within a few hundred yards from the native encampment, the men of which I employ to cultivate my land. From among the tribe that had settled here, and which formed a portion of the Oulad-Taadja, I chose, as soon as I arrived here, that tall fellow whom you have just seen, Mohammed ben Lam-har, who soon became greatly attached to me. As he would not sleep in a house, not being accustomed to it, he pitched his tent a few yards from my house, so that I might be able to call him from my window.

"You can fancy what my life was, I dare say.

Every day I was busy with clearing and planting. I hunted a little. I used to go and dine with the officers of the neighboring fortified post or they came and dined with me. As for pleasures, I have told you of what they consisted. Algiers offered me some which were rather more refined, and from time to time a complaisant and compassionate Arab would stop me when I was out for a walk and offer to bring one of the women of his tribe to my house at night. Sometimes I accepted, but more frequently I refused, for fear of the disagreeable consequences and the trouble it might entail upon me.

"One evening at the beginning of summer I was on my way home, after going over the farm, and as I wanted Mohammed, I went into his tent without calling him, as I frequently did, and there I saw a woman, a girl, sleeping almost nude, with her arms crossed under her head, on one of those thick red carpets, made of the fine wool of Djebel-Amour, which are as soft and thick as a feather-bed. Her body, which was beautifully white under the ray of light that came in through the raised covering of the tent, appeared to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race that I had ever seen, and most of the women about here are beautiful and tall, and are a rare combination of fine features and form. I let the flap of the tent fall in some confusion and returned home.

"The sudden flash of this vision had penetrated and scorched me and caused the blood to run

through my veins with all the old ardor. It was a very hot July evening, and I spent nearly the whole night at my window, with my eyes fixed on the black Mohammed's tent.

"When he came into my room the next morning, I looked him closely in the face, and he hung his head like a man who was guilty and confused. Did he guess that I knew? I asked him suddenly:

" 'So you are married, Mohammed?' and I saw that he got red and he stammered out: 'No, *Moussié!*'

"I used to make him speak French to me and give me Arabic lessons, which was often productive of a most incoherent mixture of languages. However, I continued:

" 'Then why is there a woman in your tent?'

" 'She comes from the South,' he said in a low, apologetic voice.

" 'Oh! So she comes from the South? But that does not explain to me how she comes to be in your tent.'

"Without answering my question, he continued:

" 'She is very pretty.'

" 'Oh! Indeed. Another time, please, when you happen to receive a pretty woman from the South, you will take care that she comes to my *gourbi* and not to yours. You understand me, Mohammed?'

" 'Yes, *Moussié,*' he repeated, seriously.

"I must acknowledge that during the whole day I was in a state of aggressive excitement at the

recollection of that Arab girl lying on the red carpet, and when I went in at dinner time, I felt very strongly inclined to go to Mohammed's tent again. During the evening he waited on me just as usual and hovered round me with his impassive face, and several times I came very near asking him whether he intended to keep that girl from the South, who was very pretty, in his camel-skin tent for any length of time.

"Toward nine o'clock, still troubled with that longing for woman's society which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out to get some fresh air and to stroll about a little round that cone of brown canvas through which I could see a brilliant speck of light. I did not remain long, however, for fear of being surprised by Mohammed in the neighborhood of his dwelling. When I went in an hour later, I clearly saw his outline in the tent, and then, taking the key out of my pocket, I went into the *bordj,* where besides myself, there slept my steward, two French laborers and an old cook whom I had picked up in Algiers. As I went upstairs I was surprised to see a streak of light under my door, and when I opened it, I saw a girl with the face of a statue sitting on a straw chair beside the table, on which a wax candle was burning; she was bedizened with all those silver ornaments which women in the South wear on their legs, arms, breasts, and even on the abdomen. Her eyes, which were tinged with kohl, to make them look larger, regarded

me earnestly, and four little blue spots, finely tattooed on her skin, marked her forehead, her cheeks and her chin. Her arms, which were loaded with bracelets, were resting on her thighs, which were covered by the long red silk *gebba,* or covering, that fell from her shoulders.

"When she saw me come in, she rose and remained standing in front of me, covered with her barbaric jewels, in an attitude of proud submission.

" 'What are you doing here?' I said to her in Arabic.

" 'I am here because Mohammed told me to come.'

" 'Very well; sit down.'

So she sat down and lowered her eyes while I examined her attentively.

"She had a strange, regular, delicate and rather animal-like face, but mysterious as that of a Buddha. Her lips, which were somewhat thick and with a sort of red bloom, which I discovered on other portions of her body as well, indicated a slight admixture of negro blood, although her hands and arms were of an irreproachable whiteness.

"I hesitated as to what to do with her, and felt excited, tempted, and rather embarrassed; so, in order to gain time and give myself an opportunity for reflection, I put other questions to her: about her birth, how she came into this part of the country, and what her connection with Mohammed was. But she replied only to those that interested me the least, and it was impossible for me to find out why

she had come, with what intention, by whose orders, or what had taken place between her and my servant. However, just as I was about to say to her: 'Go back to Mohammed's tent,' she seemed to guess my intention, for rising suddenly, and raising her two bare arms, on which the jingling bracelets slipped down to her shoulders, she clasped her hands behind my neck and drew me toward her with an irresistible suppliant air of longing.

"Her eyes, which were bright from emotion, from that necessity of conquering man, which imparts to the looks of an impure woman the same fascination as that exercised by the eyes of the feline tribe, allured me, enchanted me, deprived me of all power of resistance and filled me with impetuous ardor. It was a short, sharp struggle of the eyes only, that eternal struggle between those two human brutes, the male and the female, in which the male is always vanquished.

"Her hands, which were clasped behind my head, drew me irresistibly, with a gentle, increasing pressure, as if by mechanical force, toward her red lips, on which I suddenly pressed mine, while at the same moment I clasped, in an ardent embrace, her body covered with jingling silver rings.

"She was as nervous, supple and healthy as a wild animal, with all the motions, the ways, the grace and even something of the odor of a gazelle, which made me find a rare, unfamiliar zest in her kisses, as new to my senses as the taste of tropical fruit.

"Presently—I say presently, although it may have been toward morning—I wished to send her away, as I thought she would go in the same way that she had come. At the moment I did not even ask myself what I should do with her, or what she would do with me, but as soon as she guessed my intention, she whispered:

" 'If you send me away, where shall I go? I shall have to sleep on the ground in the open air at night. Let me sleep on the rug at the foot of your bed.'

"What answer could I give her, or what could I do? I thought that probably Mohammed also would be watching the window of my room, in which a light was burning, and various questions which I had not asked myself during the first minutes, formulated themselves clearly in my brain.

" 'Stay here,' I replied, 'and we will talk.'

"My resolution was taken in a moment. As the girl had been thrown into my arms in this manner I would keep her; I would make her a kind of slave-wife, hidden in my house, as women are in a harem. When the time should come that I no longer cared for her, it would be easy for me to get rid of her in some way or other, for on African soil that sort of creature almost belongs to us, body and soul; and so I said:

" 'I wish to be kind to you, and I will treat you so that you shall not be unhappy, but I must know who you are and where you come from.'

"She saw clearly that she must say something, and she told me her story—or rather a story, for no doubt she was lying—from beginning to end, as all Arabs do, with or without any motive.

"That is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible signs of the native character—Arabs always lie. Those people in whom Islam has become so incarnate that it has become part of themselves—to such an extent as to model their instincts and modify the entire race, and to differentiate it from others in morals as the color of the skin distinguishes a negro from a white man—are liars to the backbone, so that one never can trust a word they say. I do not know whether they owe that to their religion, but one must have lived among them in order to know the extent to which lying forms part of their being, of their heart and soul, until it has become second nature, an absolute necessity of life, with them.

"She told me that she was the daughter of a Caldi of the Ouled Sidi Cheik and of a woman whom he had carried off in a raid against the Touaregs. The woman must have been a black slave, or at any rate, have sprung from a first cross of Arab and negro blood. Nothing of such an origin was to be noticed, however, except the crimson color of her lips and the dark nipples of her elongated breasts. No one who knew anything about the races could be mistaken in that. But all the rest of her belonged to the beautiful race from the South; white-

skinned, supple, with a delicate face formed on straight and simple lines like those of a Hindu image. Her eyes, which were very far apart, heightened the somewhat goddess-like appearance of this desert waif.

"I knew nothing exact about her real life. She related it to me in incoherent fragments, which seemed to rise at random from a disordered memory, and with them she mingled naïvely childish observations; a whole vision of a nomad world, born of a brain like that of a squirrel, which had leaped from tent to tent, from encampment to encampment, from tribe to tribe. All this was told with the serious look that this reserved people maintain, with the appearance and rather comic gravity of a brass idol.

"When she had finished, I perceived that I had not remembered anything of that long story, full of insignificant events, which she had stored in her flighty brain, and I asked myself whether she had not simply been making sport of me with her empty and would-be serious chatter, which told me nothing about herself nor about any real facts connected with her life.

"And I thought of that conquered race, amid whom we have encamped, or, rather, who are encamping in our midst; whose language we are beginning to speak; whom we see every day, living under the transparent canvas of their tents, on whom we have imposed our laws, our regulations,

and our customs; and about whom we know nothing—nothing I assure you, any more than if we had not been here, and had not been occupied chiefly in observing them, for nearly sixty years. We know no more about what is going on in those huts made of branches, and under those small canvas cones fastened to the ground by stakes, which are within twenty yards of our doors, than we know what the so-called civilized Arabs of the Moorish houses in Algiers do, think, and are. Behind the whitewashed walls of their town houses, behind the partitions of their *gourbi,* which is made of branches, or behind that thin, brown curtain of camel's hair, which the wind flutters, they live close to us, unknown, mysterious, liars, cunning, submissive, smiling, impenetrable. What if I were to tell you, that when I look at the neighboring encampment through my field-glass, I can guess at practice of superstitions, customs, ceremonies, a thousand things of which we know nothing, and which we do not even suspect! Never previously, in all probability, did a conquered race know so well how to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence and the unceasing, but useless, investigations of its conquerors.

"I suddenly felt the insurmountable secret barrier which incomprehensible nature had set up between the two races more than I had ever felt it before; the barrier between this Arab girl and myself, between this woman who had just given herself to me,

who had yielded herself to my caresses; and, thinking of it for the first time, I asked: 'What is your name?'

"She did not speak for some moments, and I saw her start, as if she had forgotten that I was there; then, in her eyes that were raised to mine, I saw that that moment had sufficed for her to be overcome by sleep, irresistible, sudden, almost overwhelming, like everything that lays hold of the mobile senses of women, and she answered, carelessly, suppressing a yawn:

" 'Allouma.'

" 'Are you sleepy?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Very well, then, go to sleep!'

"She stretched herself out tranquilly by my side, lying on her stomach, with her forehead resting on her folded arms, and I felt almost immediately that her fleeting, untutored thoughts were lulled in repose, while I began to ponder, and tried to understand it all. Why had Mohammed given her to me? Had he acted the part of a magnanimous servant, who sacrifices himself for his master, even to the extent of giving up to him the woman whom he had brought into his own tent? Or had he, on the other hand, obeyed a more complex and more practical, though less generous impulse, in handing over to me this girl who had taken my fancy? An Arab, when an affair is a question of women, is rigorously modest yet unspeakably complaisant, and one can no

more understand his rigorous yet easy morality than one can comprehend all the rest of his sentiments. Perhaps, when I accidentally went into his tent, I had merely forestalled the benevolent intentions of this thoughtful servant, who had intended to give me this woman, his friend and accomplice, or perhaps even his sweetheart.

"All these suppositions assailed me, and fatigued me so much, that, at last, in my turn, I fell into a profound sleep, from which I was roused by the creaking of my door, and Mohammed came in to call me as usual. He opened the window, through which a flood of light streamed, and fell over Allouma, who was still asleep; then he picked up my trousers, coat, and waistcoat from the floor, in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman who was lying by my side, did not seem to know or to remark that she was there, and preserved his ordinary gravity, demeanor and looks. But the light, the movement, the slight noise his bare feet made, the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs, roused Allouma from her lethargy. She stretched out her arms, turned over, opened her eyes, and looked at me and then at Mohammed with the same indifference; then she sat up in bed and said: 'I am hungry.'

" 'What would you like?'

" 'Kahoua.'

" 'Coffee and bread and butter?'

" 'Yes.'

"Mohammed remained standing close to the

couch, with my clothes under his arm, waiting for my orders.

" 'Bring breakfast for Allouma and me,' I said to him.

"He went out, without his face betraying the slightest astonishment or anger, and as soon as he had left the room, I said to the girl:

" 'Will you live in my house?'

" 'I should like to, very much.'

" 'I will give you a room to yourself, and a woman to wait on you.'

" 'You are very generous, and I am grateful to you.'

" 'But if you behave badly, I shall send you away immediately.'

" 'I will do everything that you wish.'

"She took my hand and kissed it as a token of submission, and then Mohammed came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it, and I said to him:

" 'Allouma is going to live here. You must spread a carpet on the floor of the room at the end of the passage, and get Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara's wife to come and wait on her.'

" 'Yes, *Moussié*.'

"That was all.

"An hour later my beautiful Arab was installed in a large, airy, light room, and when I went in to make sure that everything was as it should be, she asked me in a beseeching tone of voice to make

her a present of a wardrobe with a mirror. I promised it to her; then I left her crouching on the carpet of Djebel-Amour, a cigarette in her mouth, and chatting away with the old Arabian woman for whom I had sent, as if they had known each other for years.

II

"I was very happy with Allouma for a month, and I became strangely attached to this creature of another race, who seemed to me to be almost an entirely different being, born on a neighboring planet.

"I cannot say that I loved her—no—one does not love the girls of this primitive continent. Between them and us, even between them and their natural males, the Arabs, the little blue flower of northern climes never blooms. They are too much like animals, their hearts are too rudimentary, their feelings are not refined enough to awaken in us that sentimental exaltation which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of thought or feeling is mingled with that intoxication of the senses which those charming, vacant beings excite in us. Nevertheless they captivate us as others do, but in a different fashion, which is less tenacious, and, at the same time, less cruel and painful.

"I cannot even now explain what I felt for her. I have told you that this country—this Africa, devoid of art, devoid of all intellectual pleasures—

gradually captivates us through its climate, through the continual mildness of dawn and sunset, its delightful light, and the feeling of well-being with which it fills the senses. Allouma captivated me in the same manner, by a thousand hidden, physical, alluring charms.

"I left her absolutely free to come and go as she pleased, and she certainly spent one afternoon out of two with the wives of my native agricultural laborers. Often also she would remain for nearly a whole day admiring herself in front of a mahogany wardrobe with a large mirror in the door for which I had sent from Miliana.

"She admired herself conscientiously, standing before the glass door in which she followed her own movements with profound and serious attention. She walked with her head somewhat thrown back, in order to be able to see whether her hips and back swayed properly; went away, came back again, and then, tired with her own movements, she sat down on a cushion opposite her own reflection, and remained with her eyes gazing seriously into the eyes in the mirror, her whole soul absorbed in that picture.

"Soon I began to notice that she went out nearly every morning after breakfast, and that she disappeared altogether until evening, and as I felt rather anxious about this, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she could be doing during all those long hours of absence, but he replied very calmly:

" 'Do not be uneasy. It will be the Feast of Ramadan soon and she goes to say her prayers.'

"He also seemed delighted at having Allouma in the house, but I never once saw anything between them to arouse suspicion; so I accepted the situation as it was, and let time, accident, and life act for themselves.

"Often, after I had inspected my farm, my vineyards, and my clearings, I would take long walks. You know the magnificent forests in this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines, where fallen pine-trees stem the mountain torrents, and those little valleys filled with oleanders, which look like oriental carpets stretching along the banks of the streams. You know that at every moment, in these woods and on these hills, which one would think that no one had ever penetrated, one suddenly sees the white dome of a shrine which contains the bones of a humble, solitary marabout, and which is rarely visited, from time to time, by a few confirmed believers, who come from the neighboring villages with candles in their pockets to set up before the tomb of the saint.

"One evening as I was on my way home, I was passing one of these Mohammedan shrines, and looking in through the door, which was always open, I saw a woman praying before the altar—an Arab woman, sitting on the ground in that dilapidated building, into which the wind entered as it pleased and heaped up the fine, dry pine needles in yellow

heaps in the corners. I went near to see better, and recognized Allouma. She neither saw nor heard me, so absorbed was she with the saint, to whom she was speaking in a low voice, as if she thought herself alone with him, and was telling this servant of God all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped for a short time to think, to try to recollect what more she had to say, so that she might not forget anything that she wished to confide to him; then again she would grow animated, as if he had replied to her, as if he had advised her to do something that she did not wish to do, the reasons for which she was impugning. I went away as I had come, without making any sound, and returned home to dinner.

"That evening, when I sent for her, I saw that she had a thoughtful look, which was not usual with her.

" 'Sit down there,' I said, pointing to her place on the couch by my side. As soon as she had sat down, I stooped to kiss her, but she drew her head away quickly, and, in great astonishment, I said:

" 'What is the matter?'

" 'It is the Ramadan,' she said.

" 'I began to laugh and said: 'And the Marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during the Ramadan?'

" 'Oh, yes! I am an Arab, and you are a Roumi!'

" 'And it would be a great sin?'

" 'Oh, yes!'

" 'So you ate nothing all day, until sunset?'

" 'No, nothing.'

" 'But you had something to eat after sunset?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you ought not to be more strict about other things than you are about your lips.'

"She seemed irritated, wounded, and offended, and replied with an amount of pride that I had never noticed in her before:

" 'If an Arab girl were to allow herself to be caressed by a Roumi during the Ramadan she would be cursed forever.'

" 'And this is to continue for a whole month?'

" 'Yes, for the whole of the month of Ramadan,' she replied, with great firmness.

"I assumed an irritated manner and said: 'Very well, then, you can go and spend the Ramadan with your family.'

"She seized my hands, and laying them on my heart, she said:

" 'Oh, please do not be unkind, and you shall see how good I will be. We will keep Ramadan together, if you like. I will look after you and humor you, but don't be unkind.'

"I could not help smiling at her strange manner and her anxiety, and I sent her to sleep at home; but, an hour later, just as I was thinking about going to bed, two little taps came at my door, which were so slight, however, that I hardly heard them; but when I said, 'Come in,' Allouma appeared, car-

rying a large tray covered with Arab dainties, rice croquettes sauté and covered with sugar, and a variety of other strange Arab delicacies.

"She laughed, showing her white teeth, and said: 'Come, we will keep Ramadan together.'

"You know that the fast, which begins at dawn and ends at twilight, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish a black from a white thread, is followed every evening by small friendly entertainments, at which eating is kept up until the morning, and the result is that for such of the natives as are not very scrupulous, Ramadan consists of turning day into night and night into day. But Allouma carried her delicacy of conscience further than this. She placed her tray between us on the divan, and taking a small sugared ball between her long, slender fingers, she put it into my mouth and whispered: 'Eat it—it is very good.'

"I munched the light cake, which was really excellent, and asked her: 'Did you make that?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'For me?'

" 'Yes, for you.'

" 'To enable me to support Ramadan?'

" 'Oh, don't be so unkind! I will bring you some every day.'

"Oh, the terrible month that I spent! A sugared, insipidly sweet month, a month that nearly drove me mad; a month of petting and of temptation, of anger and of vain efforts to resist temptation, but at last

the three days of Beiram came, which I celebrated in my own fashion, and Ramadan was forgotten.

"The summer went on, and it was very hot, and in the first days of autumn Allouma appeared to me to be preoccupied and absent-minded and apparently took no interest in anything; and, at last, when I sent for her one evening, she was not to be found in her room. I thought that she was roaming about the house, and gave orders to look for her. She had not come in, however, and so I opened my window and called Mohammed.

"The voice of the man, who was lying in his tent, replied:

" 'Yes, *Moussié.*'

" 'Do you know where Allouma is?'

" 'No, *Moussié.* It is not possible—Is Allouma lost?"

"A few moments later my Arab came into my room, so agitated that he could not master his feelings, and said:

" 'Is Allouma lost?'

" 'Yes, she is lost.'

" 'It is impossible.'

" 'Go and look for her,' I said.

"He remained standing where he was, thinking, seeking for her motives, and unable to understand anything about it. Then he went into the empty room, where Allouma's clothes were lying about, in Oriental disorder. He examined everything, as if he had been a police officer, or, rather, he sniffed

about like a dog, and then, incapable of any lengthened effort, he murmured resignedly:

"'She has gone!'

"I was afraid that some accident had happened to her; that she had fallen into some ravine and sprained her ankle, and I immediately sent out all the men about the place with orders to look for her until they should find her, and they hunted for her all that night, the next day and all the week long, but nothing was discovered that could put us on her track. I suffered, for I missed her very much; my house seemed empty and my existence a void. And then horrible thoughts entered my mind. I feared that she might have been carried off or even murdered; but when I spoke about it to Mohammed, and tried to make him share my fears, he invariably replied:

"'No, gone away.'

"Then he added the Arab word *r'ézale,* which means *gazelle,* as if he meant to say that she could run quickly and that she was far away.

"Three weeks passed, and I had given up all hopes of seeing my Arab mistress again, when one morning Mohammed came into my room, with every sign of joy in his face, and said to me:

"'*Moussié,* Allouma has come back.'

"I jumped out of bed and said: 'Where is she?'

"'She does not dare to come in! There she is, under the tree.'

"And stretching out his arm, he pointed out to

me, through the window, a whitish spot at the foot of an olive-tree.

"I got up immediately and went out to the spot where she was. As I approached something that looked like a mere bundle of linen thrown against the gnarled trunk of the tree, I recognized the large, dark eyes, the tattooed stars and the long, regular features of that semi-wild girl who had so captivated my senses. As I advanced toward her, I felt inclined to strike her, to make her suffer pain, and to have my revenge, so I called out to her from a short distance:

" 'Where have you been?'

"She did not reply, but remained motionless and inert, as if she were hardly alive, resigned to any violence and ready to receive my blows. I was standing up, close to her, looking in stupefaction at the rags with which she was covered, at those bits of silk and wool, covered with dust, torn and dirty, and, raising my hand, as if she had been a dog, I repeated:

" 'Where have you come from?'

" 'From yonder,' she said in a whisper.

" 'Where is that?'

" 'From the tribe.'

" 'What tribe?'

" 'Mine.'

" 'Why did you go away?'

"When she saw that I would not beat her, she grew rather bolder and said in a low voice:

" 'I was obliged to do it—I was forced to go; I could not stay in the house any longer.'

"I saw tears in her eyes, and immediately felt softened. I leaned over her, and when I turned round to sit down, I noticed Mohammed, who was watching us at a distance, and I continued very gently:

" 'Come, tell me why you ran away.'

"Then she told me that in her nomad heart she had felt the irresistible desire for a long time, to return to the tents, to lie, to run, to roll on the sand; to wander about the plains with the flocks, to feel nothing over her head, between the yellow stars in the sky and the blue stars in her face, except the thin, threadbare, patched canvas, through which she could see the sparks of fire in the sky when she awoke during the night.

"She made me understand all that in such simple and forcible language that I felt quite sure she was not lying; so I pitied her and asked:

" 'Why did you not tell me that you wished to go away for a time?'

" 'Because you would not have allowed me to go.'

" 'If you had promised to come back, I should have consented.'

" 'You would not have believed me.'

"Seeing I was not angry, she laughed and said:

" 'You see that it is all over; I have come home again, and here I am. I only wanted a few days there. I have had enough of it now, it is finished

and passed; the feeling is cured. I have come back and have not that longing any more. I am very glad and you are very kind.'

" 'Come into the house,' I said to her.

"She got up, and I took her hand, her delicate hand, with its slender fingers; and, triumphant in her rags, with her bracelets and her necklace jingling, she went gravely toward my house, where Mohammed was waiting for us. But before going in I said:

" 'Allouma, whenever you wish to return to your own people, tell me, and I will allow you to go.'

" 'You promise?'

" 'Yes, I promise.'

" 'And I will make you a promise also. When I feel ill or unhappy'—and here she put her hand to her forehead with a magnificent gesture—'I shall say to you; "I must go yonder," and you will let me go.'

"I went with her to her room, followed by Mohammed, who was carrying some water, for there had been no time to tell the wife of Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara that her mistress had returned. As soon as she entered her room and saw the wardrobe with the looking-glass in the door, she ran up to it, as a child does when it sees its mother. She looked at herself for a few seconds, pouted, and then in a rather irritated voice she said aloud to the mirror:

" 'Wait a moment; I have some silk robes somewhere. I shall be beautiful in a few minutes.' I left her alone, to act the coquette to herself.

"Our life began its usual course again, as formerly, and I felt more and more under the influence of the strange, merely physical attraction of that girl, for whom, at the same time, I felt a kind of paternal contempt. For two months all went well, and then I observed that she was again becoming nervous, agitated, and rather low-spirited, and one day I said to her:

" 'Do you want to go home again?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'And you did not dare to tell me?'

" 'I did not venture to.'

" 'Go if you wish; I give you permission.'

"She seized my hands and kissed them, as she did in all her outbursts of gratitude, and the same morning she disappeared.

"She came back, as she had the first time, at the end of about three weeks, in rags, covered with dust, and satiated with her nomad life of sand and liberty. In two years she returned to her own people four times in this fashion.

"I took her back gladly, without any feeling of jealousy, for with me jealousy can spring only from love, as we Europeans understand it. I might have killed her if I had surprised her in the act of deceiving me, but I should have done it just as one half kills a disobedient dog, from sheer violence. I should not have felt those torments, that consuming fire—Northern jealousy. I have said that I should have killed her as I would kill a disobedient dog,

and, as a matter of fact, I loved her somewhat in the same manner as one loves some very high-bred horse or dog which it is impossible to replace. She was a splendid animal, a sensual animal, an animal made for pleasure, in the form of a woman.

"I cannot tell you what an immeasurable distance separated our two souls, although our hearts perhaps occasionally warmed toward each other. She was something belonging to my house, she was part of my life, she had become necessary to me, to the carnal man in me which was only eyes and senses.

"One morning, Mohammed came into my room with a strange look on his face, that uneasy look of the Arabs, which resembles the furtive look of a cat face to face with a dog, and when I noticed his expression, I said:

" 'What is the matter now?'

" 'Allouma has gone away.'

"I began to laugh and said: 'Where has she gone?'

" 'Gone away altogether, *Moussié.*'

" 'What do you mean by gone away altogether? You are mad, my man.'

" 'No, *Moussié.*'

" 'Why has she gone away? Explain yourself; come!'

"He remained motionless, and evidently did not wish to speak, and then he had one of those explosions of Arab rage which make us stop in the street in front of two demoniacs, whose Oriental silence and gravity suddenly give place to the most violent

gesticulations, and the most ferocious vociferations, and I gathered amid his shouts that Allouma had run away with my shepherd. When I had partially succeeded in quieting him, I managed to extract the facts from him one by one.

"It was a long story, but at last I gathered that Mohammed had been watching Allouma, who used to meet a sort of vagabond whom my steward had hired the month before, behind the neighboring cactus woods, or in the ravine where the oleanders bloomed. Only the night before Mohammed had seen her go out without seeing her return, and he repeated, in an exasperated manner: 'Gone, *Moussié;* she has gone away!'

"I do not know why, but his conviction, the conviction that she had run away with this vagabond, laid hold of me irresistibly in a moment. It was absurd, unlikely, and yet certain, in virtue of that very unreasonableness which constitutes the only logic of women.

"Boiling with indignation, I tried to recall the man's features, and I suddenly remembered having seen him the previous week, standing on a mound amid his flock and watching me. He was a tall Bedouin, the color of whose bare limbs blended with that of his rags; he was the type of a barbarous brute, with high cheek-bones and hooked nose, a retreating chin, thin legs, and a tall carcass in rags, with the shifty eyes of a jackal.

"I did not doubt for a moment that she had run

away with that beggar. Why? Because she was Allouma, a daughter of the desert. A Parisian girl of a certain class would have run away with my coachman or some thief in the suburbs.

" 'Very well,' I said to Mohammed. Then I got up, opened my window and began to draw in the stifling south wind, for the sirocco was blowing, and I thought to myself:

"Good heavens! she is—a woman, like so many others. Does anyone know what prompts them, what makes them love, what makes them follow, or throw over a man? One certainly does know occasionally, but often one does not, and sometimes one is in doubt. Why did she run away with that repulsive brute? Why? Perhaps because the wind had been blowing from the South for a month; that was enough, a breath of wind! Does she know, do they know, even the cleverest of them, why they act as they do? No more than a weather-cock that turns with the breeze. An imperceptible breeze makes the iron, brass, zinc, or wooden arrow revolve, in the same manner that some imperceptible influence, some undiscernible impression moves the female heart, and urges it on to action; and it does not matter whether they belong to town or country, the suburbs of the desert.

"They can feel later providing that they can reason and understand, why they have done one thing rather than another; but for the moment they do not know, for they are the playthings of their

own amazing sensibility, the thoughtless, giddy-headed slaves of circumstances, of their surroundings, of chance meetings, and of all the sensations with which their souls and bodies vibrate."

Monsieur Auballe had risen, and, after walking up and down the room once or twice, he looked at me and said with a smile:

"That is love in the desert!"

"Suppose she were to come back?" I asked him.

"Wretched girl!" he replied. "Still I should be very glad if she should return to me."

"And you would pardon the shepherd?"

"Good heavens, yes! With women one must always pardon—or else pretend not to see things."

A STRANGE MEETING

IT was only a little accident, an accident pure and simple. On that particular evening the Princess's private apartments were open, and as they appeared dark after the brilliantly lighted parlors, Baron d'Etraille, who was tired of standing, wandered casually into an empty bedroom.

He looked around for a chair in which he might have a doze, as he was sure his wife would not leave the house before daylight. As soon as he became accustomed to the light of the room, he distinguished the large bed with its blue-and-gold hangings, standing in the middle of the great room, looking like a catafalque in which love was buried, for the Princess was no longer young. Behind it, a smooth bright surface looked like a lake seen at a distance. It was a large mirror, discreetly hung with dark drapery, which was very rarely let down, and seemed to be looking at the bed, its accomplice. One might almost fancy that it had reminiscences, and that one could see in it charming female forms and the gentle movement of loving arms.

The Baron stood still a moment, smiling, almost experiencing emotion on the threshold of this chamber dedicated to love. But suddenly something appeared in that mirror, as if the phantoms he had evoked had risen before him. A man and a woman who had been sitting on a low couch concealed in the shadow had arisen, and the polished surface, reflecting their figures, showed that they were kissing before separating.

Baron d'Etraille recognized his wife and the Marquis de Cervigné. He turned and went away like a man fully master of himself, and waited till it was day before taking the Baroness away, but he had no longer any thought of sleeping.

As soon as they were alone he said:

"Madame, I saw you in Princesse de Raynes's room; I need say no more, and I am not fond either of reproaches, acts of violence, or of ridicule. As I wish to avoid all such things, we shall separate without any scandal. Our lawyers will settle your position according to my orders. You will be free to live as you please when you are no longer under my roof; but, as you will continue to bear my name, I must warn you that should any scandal arise I shall show myself inflexible."

She tried to speak, but he stopped her, bowed, and left the room.

He was more astonished and sad than unhappy. He had loved her dearly during the first period of their married life; but his ardor had cooled, and

now he often amused himself elsewhere, either in a theater or in society, though he had preserved a certain friendly feeling for the Baroness.

She was still very young, hardly four-and-twenty, small, slight—too slight—and very fair. She was a true Parisian doll: clever, spoiled, elegant, coquettish, witty, with more charm than real beauty. He used to say familiarly to his brother, when speaking of her: "My wife is charming, attractive, but—there is nothing to lay hold of. She is like a glass of champagne that is all froth; when you get to the wine it is very good, but unfortunately, there is too little of it."

He walked up and down the room in great agitation, thinking of a thousand things. At one moment he was furious, and felt inclined to give the Marquis a thrashing, or to slap his face publicly, in the club. But he decided that would not do, it would not be good form; he would be laughed at, and not his rival, and this thought wounded his vanity. So he went to bed, but could not sleep. Paris knew in a few days that the Baron and Baroness d'Etraille had agreed to an amicable separation because of incompatibility of temper. No one suspected anything, no one laughed, and no one was astonished.

The Baron, however, to avoid meeting his wife, traveled for a year, then spent the summer at the seaside, and the autumn in shooting, returning to Paris in winter. He did not meet the Baroness once.

He did not even know what people said about her. In any case, she took care to save appearances and that was all he asked for.

He became dreadfully bored, traveled again, restored his old castle of Villebosc, which occupied two years; then for more than a year he entertained friends there, till at last, tired of all these so-called pleasures, he returned to his mansion in the Rue de Ville, six years after the separation.

He was now forty-five, with a good crop of gray hair, rather stout, and with that melancholy look characteristic of those who have been handsome, sought after, and liked, but who are deteriorating daily.

A month after his return to Paris he took cold on coming out of his club, and had such a bad cough that his medical man ordered him to Nice for the rest of the winter.

He reached the station only a few minutes before the departure of the train on a Monday evening, and had barely time to get into a carriage, with only one other occupant, who was sitting in a corner so wrapped in furs and cloaks that he could not even distinguish whether it was a man or a woman, as nothing of the figure could be seen. When he perceived that he could not find out, he put on his traveling-cap, rolled himself up in his rugs, and stretched out comfortably to sleep.

He did not wake until the day was breaking, and looked at once at his fellow-traveler, who had not

stirred all night, and seemed still to be sound asleep.

Monsieur d'Etraille made use of the opportunity to brush his hair and his beard, and to try to freshen himself up a little generally, for a night's travel does not improve one's appearance when one has attained a certain age.

A great writer has said:

"When we are young, our mornings are triumphant! Then we wake up with a cool skin, a bright eye, and glossy hair. As one grows older one wakes up in a very different condition. Dull eyes, red, swollen cheeks, dry lips, hair and beard disarranged, impart an old, fatigued look to the face."

The Baron opened his traveling-case, and improved his looks as much as possible.

The engine whistled, the train stopped, and his neighbor moved. No doubt he was awake. They rushed on again, and then a slanting ray of sunlight shone into the carriage and on the sleeper, who moved again, shook himself, and then the face could be seen.

It was a young, fair, pretty, plump woman, and the Baron looked at her in amazement. He did not know what to think. He could really have sworn that it was his wife, but wonderfully changed for the better: stouter—why, she had grown as stout as he was, only it suited her much better than it suited him.

She looked at him calmly, did not seem to recognize him, and then slowly laid aside her wraps.

She had that quiet assurance of a woman who is sure of herself, who feels that on awaking she is in her full beauty and freshness.

The Baron was really bewildered. Was it his wife, or else as like her as any sister could be? Not having seen her for six years, he might be mistaken.

She yawned, and this movement betrayed her. She turned and looked at him again, calmly, indifferently, as if she hardly saw him, and then gazed out of the window.

He was agitated and greatly perplexed, and kept looking at her sidewise.

Yes, it was surely his wife! How could he have doubted? There could certainly not be two noses like that, and a thousand recollections flashed through his mind. He felt the old feeling of the intoxication of love stealing over him, and he called to mind the sweet odor of her skin, her smile when she put her arms on his shoulders, the soft intonations of her voice, all her graceful, coaxing ways.

But how she had changed and improved! It was she and yet not she. She seemed riper, more developed, more of a woman, more seductive, more desirable, adorably desirable.

And this strange, unknown woman, whom he had met accidentally in a railway carriage, belonged to him; he had only to say to her: "I insist upon it."

He had formerly slept in her arms, existed only

in her love, and now he had found her again certainly, but so changed that he hardly knew her. It was another, and yet it was she herself. It was some one who had been re-born and had formed and grown since he had left her. It was she, indeed; she whom he had loved, but who was now altered, with a more assured smile and greater self-possession. There were two women in one, mingling a great part of what was new and unknown with many sweet recollections of the past. There was something singular, disturbing, exciting about it —a kind of mystery of love in which floated a delicious confusion. It was his wife in a new body and in new flesh which his lips had never pressed.

He reflected that in a few years nearly everything changes in us; only the outline can be recognized, and sometimes even that disappears.

The blood, the hair, the skin—all change and are renewed, and when people have not seen each other for a long time, they find each other totally different beings when they meet, although they are the same and bear the same name.

And the heart also can change. Ideas may be modified and renewed, so that in forty years of life we may, by gradual and constant transformations, become four or five totally new and different beings.

He dwelt on this thought till it troubled him; it had first taken possession of him when he surprised her in the Princess's room. He was not at

all angry; it was not the same woman that he was looking at—that thin, excitable little doll of those days.

What was he to do? How should he address her? and what could he say to her? Had she recognized him?

The train stopped again. He arose, bowed, and said: "Bertha, do you want anything that I could bring you?"

She surveyed him from head to foot, and answered, without showing the slightest surprise, confusion, or anger, but with the most perfect indifference:

"I do not want anything—thank you."

He got out and walked up and down the platform a little in order to recover himself, and, as it were, to recover his senses after a fall. What should he do now? If he went into another carriage it would look as if he were running away. Should he be polite or importunate? That would look as if he were asking for forgiveness. Should he speak as if he were her master? He would look like a fool, and, besides, he really had no right to do so.

He got in again and took his place.

During his absence she had hastily arranged her dress and hair, and was now half reclining on the seat, radiant, and without showing any emotion.

He turned to her, and said: "My dear Bertha, since this singular chance has brought us together after a separation of six years—a quite friendly

separation—are we to continue to look upon each other as irreconcilable enemies? We are shut up together, *tête-à-tête,* which is so much the better or so much the worse. I shall not go to another carriage, so don't you think it is preferable to talk as friends until the end of our journey?"

She answered, quite calmly again:

"Just as you please."

He was silent a moment, really not knowing what to say; but, as he had plenty of assurance, he sat down on the middle seat, and said:

"Well, I see I must pay my court to you; so much the better. It is, however, really a pleasure, for you are charming. You cannot imagine how you have improved in the last six years. I do not know any woman who could give me that delightful sensation which I experienced just now when you emerged from your wraps. I could really have thought such a change impossible."

Without moving her head or looking at him, she said: "I cannot say the same as to you; you have certainly deteriorated a great deal."

He became red and confused; then, with a smile of resignation, he said: "You are rather severe."

"Why?" was her reply. "I am only stating facts. I don't suppose you intend to offer me your love? It must, therefore, be a matter of perfect indifference to you what I think about you. But I see it is a painful subject, so let us talk of something else. What have you been doing since I last saw you?"

He felt rather put out of countenance, and stammered: "I? I have traveled, shot, and grown old, as you see. And you?"

She said, quite calmly: "I have taken care of appearances, as you ordered me."

He was very nearly saying something brutal, but he checked himself, and kissed his wife's hand.

"And I thank you," he said.

She was surprised. He was indeed diplomatic, and always master of himself.

"As you have acceded to my first request," he continued, "shall we now talk without bitterness?"

She made a little movement of surprise.

"Bitterness? I feel none; you are a complete stranger to me; I am only trying to keep up a difficult conversation."

He was still looking at her, fascinated in spite of her harshness, and he felt seized with a brutal desire, the desire of the master.

Perceiving that she had hurt his feelings, she said:

"How old are you now? I thought you were younger than you look."

"I am forty-five;" and then he added: "I forgot to ask after the Princesse de Raynes. Are you still intimate with her?"

She looked at him as if she hated him. "Yes, I certainly am. She is very well, thank you."

They remained sitting side by side, agitated and irritated. Suddenly he said:

"My dear Bertha, I have changed my mind. You are my wife, and I expect you to come with me to-day. You have, I think, improved both morally and physically, and I intend to take you back again. I am your husband, and it is my right to do so."

She was stupefied, and looked at him, trying to divine his thoughts; but his face was resolute and impenetrable.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but I have made other engagements."

"So much the worse for you," was his reply. "The law gives me the power, and I mean to use it."

They were nearing Marseilles, and the train whistled and slackened speed. The Baroness rose, carefully rolled up her wraps, and then, turning to her husband, said:

"My dear Raymond, do not make a bad use of this *tête-à-tête*, which, let me tell you, I had carefully prepared. I wished to take precautions, according to your advice, so that I might have nothing to fear from you or from other persons, whatever might happen. You are going to Nice, are you not?"

"I shall go wherever you go."

"Not at all; listen to me, and I am sure that you will leave me in peace. In a few moments, when we arrive at the station, you will see the Princesse de Raynes and Comtesse Hermit waiting for me, with their husbands. I wished them to see us,

and to know that we had spent the night together in the railway carriage. Don't be alarmed; they will tell it everywhere as a most surprising fact.

"I told you just now that I had most carefully followed your advice and saved appearances. Nothing else matters, does it? In order to do this, I wished to be seen with you. You told me carefully to avoid any scandal, and I am avoiding it, for, I am afraid—I am afraid——"

She waited till the train had stopped, and as her friends ran up to open the carriage door, she said:

"I am afraid"—hesitating—"that there is another reason—*je suis enceinte.*"

The Princess stretched out her arms to embrace her, and the Baroness said, pointing to the Baron, who was dumb with astonishment:

"You do not recognize Raymond? He has certainly changed a good deal, and he agreed to come with me so that I might not travel alone. We take little trips like this occasionally, like good friends who cannot live together. We are about to separate here; he has had enough of me already."

She put out her hand, which he took mechanically; then she jumped out on the platform.

The Baron hastily shut the carriage door, for he was too much disturbed to say a word or come to any determination. He heard his wife's voice, and the merry laughter of the group as they went away.

He never saw her again, nor did he ever discover whether she had told him a lie or the truth.

FEMININE WILES

"WOMEN!"

"Well, what have you to say about women, my dear Count?"

"My friend, there are no conjurors more subtle than they in deceiving us at every available opportunity with or without reason, often for the sole pleasure of fooling us. And they do it with such incredible simplicity, such astonishing audacity, such unparalleled ingenuity. They fool us from morning till night, and they all do it—the most virtuous, the most upright, the most sensible of them. Let us grant that sometimes they are almost driven to do these things. Man has always idiotic fits of obstinacy and tyrannical desires. A husband is continually giving ridiculous orders in his own house. He is full of caprices; his wife humors him while she deceives him. She persuades him that a thing costs so much because he would make a fuss if it cost any more. And she always gets out of a difficulty so simply and so slyly that we gasp with

astonishment when by chance we discover her wiles. We say to ourselves: 'How is it that we did not see this before?'"

The man who spoke was an ex-minister of the empire, the Comte de L——, a thorough profligate, it was said, but a very accomplished gentleman. A group of young men were listening to him.

"I was outwitted by an ordinary little *bourgeoise* in a comic and thorough-going manner. I will tell you about it for your instruction.

"I was at the time Minister for Foreign Affairs and was in the habit of taking a long walk every morning in the Champs Elysées. It was the month of May. I walked along, inhaling eagerly the sweet odor of leaves and buds.

"Before long I noticed that I used to meet every day a charming little woman, one of those marvelous, graceful creatures who bear the stamp of Paris. Pretty? Yes and no. Well made? No, better than that: her waist was too slight, her shoulders too narrow, her bust too full, no doubt; but I prefer those exquisite human dolls to that great statuesque corpse, the Venus of Milo.

"This sort of woman trips along in an incomparable manner, and the very rustle of her skirt fills the marrow of your bones with desire. She seemed to give me a side-glance as she passed me. But these women give all sorts of glances—you never can tell.

"One morning I saw her sitting on a bench with

an open book in her hands. I walked up to her and sat down beside her. Five minutes later we were friends. Then, each day, after the smiling salutation 'Good-day, Madame,' 'Good-day, Monsieur,' we begin to chat. She told me that she was the wife of a government clerk, that her life was sad, that in it pleasures were few and cares numerous, and a thousand other things.

"I told her who I was, partly through thoughtlessness and perhaps partly through vanity. She affected to be much astonished.

"Next day she called at the ministry to see me, and she came there so often that the ushers, having their attention drawn to her appearance, used to whisper to one another as soon as they saw her, the name with which they had christened her—'Madame Léon'—that is my Christian name.

"For three months I saw her every morning without growing tired of her for a second, so well was she able to give variety and piquancy to her attractions. But one day I saw that her eyes were red and shining with suppressed tears, and that she could hardly speak, she was so preoccupied.

"I begged, I implored her to tell me the cause of her agitation.

"She faltered at last, with a shudder: 'I am —I am *enceinte!*'

"And she burst out sobbing. Oh, I made a dreadful face, and I have no doubt I turned pale, as men usually do at hearing such a piece of news.

You cannot conceive what an unpleasant stab you feel in your breast at the announcement of an unexpected paternity of this kind. So, in my turn, I gasped: 'But—but—you are married, are you not?'

"She answered: 'Yes, but my husband has been away in Italy for the last two months, and he will not return for some time.'

"I was determined at any cost to get out of my responsibility.

"You must go and join him immediately," I said.

"She blushed to her very temples, and with downcast eyes murmured: 'Yes—but——' She either dared not or would not finish the sentence.

"I understood, and I prudently sent her an envelope containing the expenses of the journey.

"Eight days later she sent me a letter from Genoa. The following week I received one from Florence. Then letters reached me from Leghorn, Rome, and Naples.

"She said to me: 'I am in good health, my dear love, but I look very ugly. I would not care to have you see me till it is all over; you would not love me. My husband suspects nothing. As his business in this country will require him to stay here much longer, I shall not return to France till after my confinement.'

"At the end of about eight months I received from Venice these few words: 'It is a boy.'

"Some time after that she suddenly entered my

study one morning, fresher and prettier than ever, and flung herself into my arms. We resumed our friendship.

"I left the ministry and she came to live in my house in the Rue de Grenelle. She often spoke to me about the child, but I hardly listened to what she said about it; it did not interest me. Now and then I placed a rather large sum of money in her hand, saying: 'Put that aside for him.'

"Two years more glided by, and she was more eager to tell me some news about the youngster—'about Léon.'

"Sometimes she would say in the midst of tears: 'You don't care about him; you don't even wish to see him. If you know what grief you cause me!'

"At last she teased me so that I promised one day to go next morning to the Champs Elysées, when she took the child there for a walk.

"But just as I was leaving the house I was stopped by a sudden apprehension. Man is weak and foolish. What if I were to grow fond of this tiny being of whom I was the father—my son?

"I had my hat on my head, my gloves in my hands. I flung down the gloves on my desk and my hat on a chair.

" 'No. Decidedly I will not go; it is wiser not to go.'

"The door flew open. My brother entered the room. He handed me an anonymous letter he had received that morning, which read:

"'Warn the Comte de L——, your brother, that the little woman of the Rue Cassette is boldly making sport of him. Let him make some inquiries about her.'

"I never had told anyone about this intrigue, but I now told my brother the story from beginning to end.

"'For my part,' I added, 'I don't want to trouble myself any further about the matter; but will you, like a good fellow, go and find out what you can about her?'

"When my brother had left me, I said to myself: 'In what way can she have deceived me? She has other lovers, perhaps? What does that matter to me? She is young, fresh and pretty; I ask nothing more from her. She seems to love me, and, as a matter of fact, does not cost me much. Really, I don't understand this business.'

"My brother returned speedily. He had learned from the police all that was to be known about her husband: 'A clerk in the Home Department, of regular habits and good repute, and, moreover, a thinking man, but married to a very pretty woman, whose expenses appeared somewhat extravagant for her modest position.' That was all.

"Now, my brother having sought for her at her residence, and finding that she had gone out, succeeded, with the assistance of a gold piece, in making the janitress chatter: 'Madame D——, a very worthy woman, and her husband a very worthy man, not proud, not rich, but generous.'

"My brother asked, for the sake of saying something:

" 'How old is her little boy now?'

" 'Why, she has no little boy, Monsieur.'

" 'What? Little Léon?'

" 'No, Monsieur, you are making a mistake.'

" 'I mean the child she had while she was in Italy two years ago.'

" 'She never has been in Italy, Monsieur. She has not left the house she is living in for the last five years.'

"My brother, in astonishment, again questioned the janitress more closely pushed his investigation of the matter further. No child, no journey!

"I was prodigiously astonished, but without clearly understanding the final meaning of this comedy.

" 'I must have mind perfectly clear about the affair,' said I to him. 'I will ask her to come here to-morrow. You shall receive her instead of I. If she has deceived me, you will hand her these ten thousand francs and I never will see her again. In fact, I am beginning to find I have had enough of her.'

"Would you believe it? I had been grieved the night before because I had had a child by this woman, and I was now irritated, ashamed, wounded at not having had one. I found myself free, released from all responsibility, from all anxiety, yet I was raging at the position in which I was placed.

"Next morning my brother awaited her in my study. She came in quickly as usual, rushing toward him with outstretched arms, but when she saw who it was she drew back at once.

"He bowed and excused himself.

" 'I beg your pardon, Madame, for being here instead of my brother, but he has authorized me to ask you for some explanations which he would find it painful to require from you himself.'

"Then fixing on her face a searching glance, he said abruptly:

" 'We know you have no child by him.'

"After the first moment of amazement, she regained her composure, took a seat and gazed with a smile at this man who was sitting in judgment on her.

" 'No, I have no child,' she answered simply.

" 'We know also that you never have been in Italy.'

"This time she burst out laughing in earnest.

" 'No, I never have been in Italy.'

"My brother, quite stunned, continued:

" 'The Count has requested me to give you this money and to tell you that everything is broken off.'

"She became serious again, calmly put the money into her pocket, and, in an ingenuous tone asked:

" 'And I am not then to see the Count any more?'

" 'No, Madame.'

"She appeared to be annoyed, but in a passionless voice she remarked:

" 'So much the worse; I was very fond of him.'

"Seeing that she had taken her stand on the subject so resolutely, my brother, smiling in his turn, said:

" 'Now, tell me why you invented all this long, complicated story of the journey to Italy, and the child?'

"She gazed at my brother in amazement, as if he had asked her a stupid question, and replied:

" 'How spiteful you are! Do you suppose a poor little *bourgeoise* like me—nobody at all—could have kept on my hands for three years the Comte de L——, Minister, a great personage, a man of fashion, wealthy and seductive, if she had not taken a little trouble about it? Now it is all over. So much the worse. It could not last forever. None the less I succeeded in doing it for three years. Give him the most kindly messages from me.'

"She rose. My brother continued:

" 'But—the child? You had one to show him?'

" 'Certainly—my sister's child. She lent it to me. I will wager it was she who gave you the information.'

" 'Good! And all those letters from Italy?'

"She sat down again to laugh at her ease.

" 'Oh, those letters—well, that is quite a poem. The Count was not a Minister of Foreign Affairs for nothing.'

" 'But—another thing?'

" 'Oh! the other thing is my secret. I don't want to compromise anyone.'

"And, bowing to him with a rather mocking smile, she left the room without any emotion, an actress who had played her part to the end."

The Comte de L—— added by way of moral: "Beware of putting your trust in such doves."

A STRANGE NIGHT IN PARIS

A CERTAIN notary at Vernon, Maître Saval, was passionately fond of music. Though still young, he was already bald; he was always carefully shaven, was somewhat corpulent, as was suitable, and wore gold eye-glasses instead of spectacles. He was active, gallant, and cheerful, and was considered quite an artist in Vernon. He played the piano and the violin, and gave musicales at which the new operas were interpreted.

He had even what is called a bit of a voice; nothing but a bit, the least chirp of a voice; but he managed it with so much taste that cries of "Bravo!" "Exquisite!" "Surprising!" "Adorable!" issued from every throat as soon as he had murmured the last note.

He subscribed to a music-publishing house in Paris, and they sent him the latest music, and from time to time he sent to the élite of the town invitations after this fashion:

"You are invited to be present on Monday evening at the house of Monsieur Saval, notary, Vernon, at the first rendering of *Saïs.*"

A few officers, who had good voices, formed the chorus. Two or three lady amateurs also sang. The notary filled the part of leader of the orchestra with so much correctness that the bandmaster of the 190th regiment of the line said of him, one day, at the Café de l'Europe:

"Oh, Monsieur Saval is a master. It is a great pity that he did not adopt the career of an artist."

When his name was mentioned in a drawing-room, somebody always declared: "He is not an amateur; he is an artist, a genuine artist."

And two or three persons would repeat, in a tone of profound conviction: "Oh! yes, a genuine artist," laying particular stress on the word "genuine."

Every time a new work was produced at an important Parisian theater, Monsieur Saval paid a visit to the capital.

Last year, according to his custom, he went to hear *Henri VIII.* He took the express train that arrives in Paris at 4:30 p. m., intending to return by the 12:35 a. m. train, so as not to have to sleep at a hotel. He had put on evening clothes, a black coat and white cravat, which he concealed under his topcoat with the collar turned up.

As soon as he set foot on the Rue d'Amsterdam, he felt himself in quite a jovial mood.

"Decidedly, the air of Paris does not resemble

any other air, he said to himself. "It has in it something indescribably stimulating, exciting, intoxicating, which fills you with a strange longing to dance about and to do many other things. As soon as I arrive here, it seems to me, all of a sudden, that I have taken a bottle of champagne. What a life one can lead in this city in the midst of artists! Happy are the elect, the great men, who make themselves a reputation in such a city! What an existence is theirs!"

He made fine plans; he would have liked to know some of these celebrated men, to talk about them in Vernon, and to spend an evening with them from time to time in Paris.

Suddenly an idea struck him. He had heard allusions to little cafés in the outer boulevards at which well-known painters, men of letters, and even musicians gathered, and he proceeded up to Montmartre at a slow pace.

He had two hours before him. He wished to look about him. He passed in front of taverns frequented by belated bohemians, gazing at the different faces, seeking to discover the artists. Finally, he came to the sign of *The Dead Rat,* and, attracted by the name, he entered.

Five or six women, with their elbows resting on the marble tables, were talking in low tones about their love-affairs, the quarrels of Lucie and Hortense, and the scoundrelism of Octave. They were no longer young, were too fat or too thin, weary,

used up. One could see that they were almost bald; and they drank beer like men.

Monsieur Saval sat down at some distance from them and waited, for the hour for taking absinthe was at hand.

A tall young man soon came in and took a seat beside him. The landlady called him Monsieur Romantin. The notary quivered. Was this the Romantin who had taken a medal at the last Salon?

The young man made a sign to the waiter.

"You will bring up my dinner at once, and then carry to my new studio, number fifteen Boulevard de Clichy, thirty bottles of beer, and the ham I ordered this morning. We are going to have a housewarming."

Monsieur Saval immediately ordered dinner. Then he removed his overcoat, so that his evening clothes and his white cravat could be seen. His neighbor did not seem to notice him. He had taken up a newspaper, and was reading it. Monsieur Saval glanced sidewise at him, burning with desire to speak to him.

Two young men entered, in red waistcoats and wearing peaked beards, in the fashion of Henry III. They sat down opposite Romantin.

"Is it for this evening?" said the first of the pair.

Romantin pressed his hand.

"Yes, my friend, and everyone will be there. I have Bonnat, Guillemet, Gervex, Béraud, Hébert,

Duez, Clairin, and Jean-Paul Laurens. It will be a stunning affair! And women, too! Wait till you see! Every actress, without exception—of course I mean, you know, all those who are not playing this evening."

The landlord of the establishment came to them.

"Do you often have this housewarming?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed," the painter replied, "every three months, each quarter."

Monsieur Saval could not restrain himself any longer and in a hesitating voice said:

"I beg your pardon for intruding on you, Monsieur, but I heard your name mentioned, and I should be very glad to know if you really are Monsieur Romantin, whose work in the last Salon I admired so much?"

"I am the very person, Monsieur," the painter replied.

The notary then paid the artist a very well-turned compliment, showing that he was a man of culture.

The painter, gratified, thanked him courteously in reply.

Then they chattered. Romantin returned to the subject of his housewarming, going into details as to the magnificence of the forthcoming entertainment.

Monsieur Saval questioned him as to all the men he was to receive, adding:

"It would be an extraordinary piece of good for-

tune for a stranger to meet at one time so many celebrities assembled in the studio of an artist of your rank."

Romantin, vanquished, replied: "If it would be agreeable to you, come."

Monsieur Saval accepted the invitation with enthusiasm, reflecting:

"I shall have time enough to see *Henri VIII.*"

Both had finished their meal. The notary insisted on paying the two bills, wishing to repay his neighbor's civilities. He paid for the drinks of the young fellows in red velvet also; then he left the establishment with the painter.

They stopped in front of a very long, low house, the first story having the appearance of an interminable conservatory. Six studios stood in a row with their fronts facing the boulevards.

Romantin was the first to enter, and, ascending the stairs, he opened a door, lighted a match and then a candle.

They found themselves in a very large apartment, the furniture of which consisted of three chairs, two easels, and a few sketches standing on the ground along the walls. Monsieur Saval remained standing at the door somewhat astonished.

"Here you are," the painter remarked; "we've come to the spot; but everything has yet to be done."

Then, examining the high, bare apartment, its ceiling disappearing in the darkness, he said:

"We might make a great deal out of this studio."

He walked round it, surveying it with the utmost attention, then went on:

"I know some one who might easily give a helping hand. Women are incomparable for hanging drapery. But I sent her to the country for to-day in order to get her off my hands this evening. It is not that she bores me, but she is too much lacking in the ways of good society. It would be embarrassing to my guests."

He reflected a few seconds, and added:

"She is a good girl, but not easy to deal with. If she knew that I was holding a reception, she would tear my eyes out."

Monsieur Saval had not even moved; he did not understand.

The artist came over to him.

"Since I have invited you, will you assist me about something?"

"Make any use of me you please," the notary said emphatically. "I am at your disposal."

Romantin took off his jacket.

"Well, citizen, to work! First we shall clean up."

He went to the back of the easel, on which was a canvas representing a cat, and he seized a much worn broom.

"I say! Just brush up here while I look after the lighting."

Monsieur Saval took the broom, inspected it, and then began to sweep the floor very awkwardly, rais-

ing a whirlwind of dust, which made them cough.

Romantin, disgusted, stopped him. "Oh, the devil! you don't know how to sweep the floor! Look at me!"

And he began to roll before him a heap of grayish sweepings, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Then, he gave the broom back to the notary, who imitated him.

In five minutes, such a cloud of dust filled the studio that Romantin asked:

"Where are you? I can't see you any longer."

Monsieur Saval, who was coughing, came near to him.

"How would you set about making a chandelier?" the painter said.

The other, surprised, asked:

"What chandelier?"

"Why, a chandelier to light the room—a chandelier with wax candles."

The notary did not understand.

"I don't know," he answered.

The painter began to jump about, cracking his fingers.

"Well, Monsieur, I have found out a way."

Then he continued more calmly:

"Have you five francs about you?"

"Why, yes," Monsieur Saval replied.

"Well," said the artist, "you go out and buy for me five francs' worth of wax candles while I go and see the cooper."

And he pushed the notary in his evening coat into the street. At the end of five minutes, they had returned, one of them with the candles and the other with the hoop of a cask. Then Romantin plunged his hand into a cupboard, and drew forth twenty empty bottles, which he fixed in the form of a crown around the hoop.

He then went downstairs to borrow a ladder from the janitress, after explaining that he had made friends with the old woman by painting the portrait of her cat, exhibited on the easel.

When he returned with the ladder, he said to Monsieur Saval:

"Are you active?"

The other, without understanding, answered: "Yes, Monsieur."

"Then just climb up there, and fasten this chandelier for me to the ring on the ceiling. Then put a candle in each bottle, and light them. I tell you I have a genius for lighting up. But off with that coat! You look like a lackey."

The door was opened brusquely. A woman appeared, and remained standing on the threshold, her eyes flashing.

Romantin gazed at her with a look of terror.

She waited some seconds, folded her arms across her breast, and in a shrill, vibrating, exasperated voice said:

"Well, you rascal, is this the way you leave me?"

Romantin made no reply. She continued:

"Ha! you scoundrel! You did a nice thing in sending me off to the country. You'll soon see the way I'll settle your sport. Yes, I intend to receive your friends."

She grew warmer.

"I'll slap their faces with the bottles and the wax candles—"

"Mathilde—" said Romantin in a soft tone.

She paid no attention to him, but continued:

"Wait a little, my fine fellow! wait a little!"

Romantin went over to her, and tried to take her by the hands. "Mathilde—"

But she was now fairly under way; and she emptied the vials of her wrath with strong words and reproaches. They flowed out of her mouth like a stream sweeping a heap of filth along with it. The words pouring forth seemed struggling for exit. She stuttered, stammered, yelled, suddenly recovering her voice to cast forth an insult or a curse.

He seized her hands without her having noticed it. She did not appear to see anything, so taken up was she in scolding and relieving her feelings. Suddenly she began to weep. The tears flowed from her eyes, but this did not stop her complaints. Her words were uttered in a screaming falsetto voice with tears in it and interrupted by sobs. She began anew two or three times, till she stopped as if something were choking her, and at last she ceased with a regular flood of tears.

Then he clasped her in his arms and kissed her hair, affected himself.

"Mathilde, my little Mathilde, listen. You must be reasonable. You know, if I give a supper-party to my friends, it is to thank these gentlemen for the medal I got at the Salon. I cannot receive women. You should understand that. It is not the same with artists as with other people."

"Why didn't you tell me this?" she stammered in the midst of her tears.

"It was in order not to annoy you," he replied; "not to give you pain. Listen, I'm going to take you home. You will be very sensible, very nice; you will remain quietly waiting for me in bed, and I'll come as soon as it's over."

"Yes, but you will not begin over again?" she murmured.

"No, I swear to you."

He turned toward Monsieur Saval, who had at last hooked on the chandelier.

"My dear friend, I am coming back in five minutes. If anyone arrives in my absence, do the honors for me, will you not?"

And he carried off Mathilde, who kept drying her eyes with her handkerchief as she went along.

Left to himself, Monsieur Saval succeeded in putting everything around him in order. Then he lighted the candles, and waited.

He waited for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour. Romantin did not return. Suddenly there was a terrible din on the stairs, a song shouted out in chorus by twenty mouths and a regular march

like that of a Prussian regiment. The whole house was shaken by the steady tramp of feet. The door flew open, and a motley throng appeared—men and women in file, two and two holding each other by the arms and stamping their heels on the ground to mark time, advanced into the studio like a snake uncoiling itself.

Monsieur Saval, thunderstruck, remained standing in evening dress under the chandelier. The procession of revelers caught sight of him, and uttered a shout:

"A Jeames! A Jeames!"

And they began whirling round him, surrounding him with a circle of vociferations. Then they took one another's hands and went dancing about madly.

"Messieurs—messieurs—mesdames——" he attempted to explain.

But they did not listen to him. They whirled about, they jumped, they brawled.

At last, the dancing ceased. Monsieur Saval said:

"Gentlemen——"

A tall young fellow, fair-haired and bearded to the nose, interrupted him:

"What is your name, my friend?"

The notary, quite scared, answered:

"I am Monsieur Saval."

"You mean Baptiste," a voice exclaimed.

"Let the poor waiter alone!" a woman said; "you'll end by making him get angry. He is paid to wait on us, and not to be laughed at by us."

Then Monsieur Saval noticed that each guest had brought his own provisions. One held a bottle of wine, and another a pie. This one had a loaf of bread, and that one a ham.

The tall, fair young fellow placed in his hands an enormous sausage, and gave orders:

"Here, go and arrange the sideboard in the corner over there. Put the bottles at the left and the provisions at the right."

Saval, quite distracted, exclaimed: "But, messieurs, I am a notary!"

There was a moment's silence and then a wild outburst of laughter. One suspicious gentleman asked: "How came you to be here?"

He explained, telling about his project of going to the opera, his departure from Vernon, his arrival in Paris, and the way in which he had spent the evening.

They gathered around him to listen to him; they greeted him with words of applause, and called him Scheherazade.

Romantin did not return. Other guests arrived. Monsieur Saval was presented to them so that he might begin his story over again. He declined; they forced him to relate it. They seated him and tied him on one of three chairs between two women who kept continually filling his glass. He drank; he laughed; he talked; he sang, too. He tried to waltz with his chair, and fell on the floor.

From that moment he forgot everything. It

seemed to him, however, that they undressed him, put him to bed, and that he was nauseated.

When he awoke, it was broad daylight, and he lay stretched out in a strange bed, with his feet against a cupboard.

An old woman with a broom in her hand was glaring angrily at him. At last she said:

"Get out, you blackguard! Get out! What right has anyone to get drunk like this?"

He sat up in bed, feeling very ill at ease.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Where are you, you dirty loafer? You are drunk. Take yourself out of here as fast as you can—and lose no time about it!"

He wanted to get up, but found that he was in no condition to do so. His clothes had disappeared. He blurted out: "Madame, I——"

Then he remembered. What was he to do?

"Did Monsieur Romantin come back?" he asked.

"Will you take yourself out of here, so that at any rate he may not catch you here?" she cried.

Monsieur Saval said, in a state of confusion:

"I haven't got my clothes; they have been taken away from me."

He had to wait, to explain his situation, to send word to his friends, and borrow some money to buy clothes. He did not leave Paris till evening.

And when people talk about music to him in his beautiful drawing-room in Vernon, he declares with an air of authority that painting is an inferior art.

ALL OVER!

THE Comte De Lormerin had just finished dressing. He cast a parting glance at the large mirror, which occupied a whole panel in his dressing-room, and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, although his hair was quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no sign of embonpoint, with a small moustache of uncertain shade, which might be called fair, he had a carriage, a nobility, a *chic,* in short—that indescribable something which establishes a greater difference between two men than would millions of money.

"Lormerin is still alive!" he murmured.

He went into the drawing-room where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work-table of the gentleman who never works, lay a dozen letters beside three newspapers of different political opinions. With a single touch he spread out all these letters, like a gambler giving the choice

of a card; and he scanned the handwriting, a thing he did every morning before opening the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry and vague anxiety. What did these sealed, mysterious letters bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing the writing, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always give him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple, nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he looked at it uneasily, with a sort of chill at his heart. He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope, without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying-glass which he used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. "Whom is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have

often read its tracings, yes, very often. But it must have been a long, long time ago. Whom the devil can it be from? Pooh! it's only some one asking for money."

He tore open the envelope, and read:

"My dear Friend: You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I left Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call "my hospital." Do you remember him? He died five years ago, and now I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married—for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you never have seen. I informed you of her birth, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.

"You are still the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well, if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call Lison, come and dine with her this evening, with the elderly Baronne de Vance, your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, although happy, reaches out to you a devoted hand, which you must clasp, but no longer kiss, my poor Jaquelet.

"Lise de Vance."

Lormerin's heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by a poignant emotion that made the tears rise to his eyes.

If he ever had loved a woman in his life it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called "Ashflower," because of the strange color of her hair and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a dainty, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail

Baroness, the wife of that gouty, pimply Baron, who had carried her off abruptly to the provinces, shut her up, kept her in seclusion through jealousy —jealousy of the handsome Lormerin!

"Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he, too, had been truly loved. She familiarly gave him the name of Jaquelet, and used to pronounce that word in a delicious way.

A thousand forgotten memories came back to him, far off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening she had called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The fragrance from her bodice embalmed the warm air—the odor of her bodice, and perhaps, too, the fragrance of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

She replied:

"I don't know. The moon and the water have affected me. Every time I see poetic things I have a tightening at the heart, and I have to weep."

He smiled, affected himself, considering her feminine emotion charming—the unaffected emotion of a poor little woman whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering: "My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love-affair, short-lived and dainty, it had been, and ended all too quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by that old brute of a Baron, who had carried off his wife and never let any one see her afterward.

Lormerin had forgotten her, in fact, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out another so quickly in Paris, when one is a bachelor! No matter; he had kept a little altar for her in his heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose, and said aloud: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

Instinctively he turned toward the mirror to inspect himself from head to foot. He reflected: "She must look very old—older than I." And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those bygone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were of no importance.

All day he kept thinking of this ghost of other days. What was she like now? How strange it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! But would he recognize her?

He made his toilet with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better with the coat than a black one, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch with the curling-iron,

for he had preserved his hair, and set off very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he beheld on entering a pretty drawing-room, newly furnished, was his own portrait, an old faded photograph, dating from the days when he was a young beau, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an elderly lady with white hair who extended both hands toward him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other several times; then, lifting his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep.

He could not abstain from murmuring: "Is it you, Lise?"

"Yes, it is I," she replied; "it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, would you? I have had so much sorrow—so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now—or, rather, don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept—and young! If I had by chance met you in the street I should have exclaimed: 'Jaquelet!' Now, sit down and let us first of all, have a chat. And then I will call my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You will see how she resembles me—or, rather, how I resembled her—no, it is not quite that; she is

just like the Lise of former days—you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over; it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman—it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. Why had he come to this house? What could he talk about? Of the long ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything in the presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer recall all the tender things, so sweet, so bitter, that had come to his mind that morning when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Ashflower. What, then, had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved? That woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young girl who used to call him "Jaquelet" so prettily?

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they talked only commonplaces, awkwardly, spasmodically, and slowly, she rose and pressed the button of the bell.

"I am going to call Renée," she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a skirt and a young voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, mamma!"

Lormerin stood bewildered as at the sight of an apparition.

"Good-day, Mademoiselle," he stammered.

Then, turning toward the mother: "Oh, it is you yourself," he added.

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and come back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even younger, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

"Good-morning, Lison!"

A servant announced: "Dinner is served, Madame."

They proceeded toward the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea:

"Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled, repeating over and over again:

"Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eyes of the young girl that he found again his memories of the past. Twenty times he opened his lips to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison?" forgetting this white-haired lady who looked at him so tenderly.

Yet, there were moments when he no longer

felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glances, in her entire being, something that he did not find again. He made prodigious efforts of mind to recall his lady-love, to seize again what had escaped from her, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

"You have lost your old vivacity, my poor friend," said the Baroness at last.

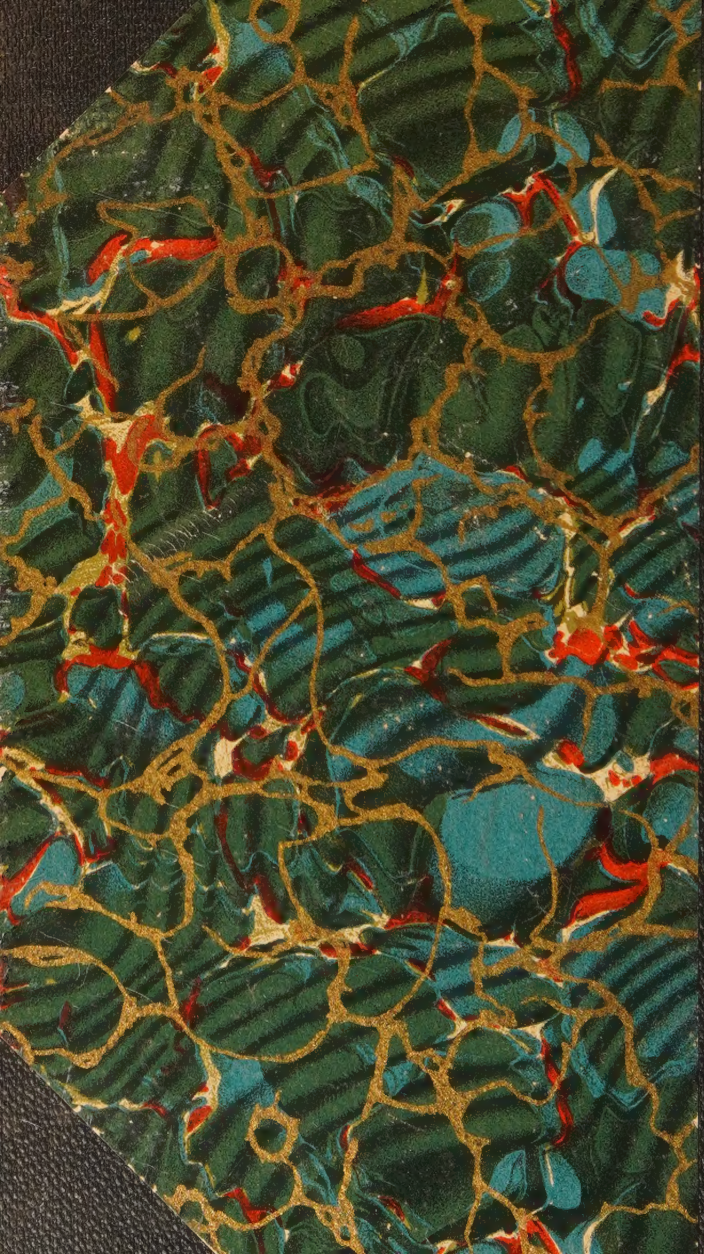
"There are many other things that I have lost," he murmured.

But in his heart, touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more, like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar intonation, some expression of her mother's, a certain style of speaking and thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He took his leave early, and walked along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Apart from the two women, he now saw only one, a young one, the old one come back out of the past, and he loved her as he had loved her in bygone years. He loved her with

greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think what he should do. But, as he was passing, with a wax candle in his hand, before the mirror, the large mirror in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had really been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying-glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightfull ravages, which he had not perceived till now.

He sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring: "It is all over, Lormerin!"